Envisioning A Regional Role: Comprehensive Universities and Conceptions of Their Regional Contributions

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Envisioning A Regional Role: Comprehensive Universities and Conceptions of Their Regional Contributions

Abstract
This study examines the ways in which comprehensive universities seek to contribute to and engage with their cities and regions. By studying three regional comprehensive universities, it uncovers the ways in which leaders and others on campus envision the role of the university in contributing to the community and the strategies put in place to animate this vision. The general regional contributions of these comprehensive universities can be delineated into four overlapping areas: the education of students in line with regional needs; engaging the intellectual resources of the university with the community; regional development; and outreach, volunteering, and fixed spending. Conceptions of the university’s role in two of the universities align with a notion of regional stewardship, as their engagement with the region is in a broad array of areas and allows the community to set priorities for the university’s contributions. The role of the other university is envisioned more narrowly on contributing to the region through the education of its students. The regional stewardship mission offers some advantages, as it legitimizes the work of more individuals on campus and has the potential to offer synergistic and complementary gains.

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ENVISIONING A REGIONAL ROLE: COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITIES AND CONCEPTIONS
OF THEIR REGIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

David Soo

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ENVISIONING A REGIONAL ROLE: COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITIES AND CONCEPTIONS
OF THEIR REGIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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In the words of Hillary Clinton, it takes a village.

First I thank my family. From them I developed the habits of mind that led me here, including my intense intellectual curiosity and taste for debate and argumentation. Never was there a quiet dinner time, and reflection was a way of life. From my parents, I learned the meaning of love, integrity, and compassion. There are fond memories of trips and adventures, and tough times that helped me see what love is, the true meaning of strength, and to know how to enjoy life. Jeff is an equal and fair debating partner, and he and I have grown to see the similarities in each other and depend on one another’s judgment and actions. My grandmother, still checking in daily about my progress in her 87th year, has taught me so much, including how to laugh—plus at least some of my strong opinions come from her! The older generation of Tsaos, Lins, and Hsus are models of lifelong bonds that go back in time and deep in strength; the connection of the younger generation (which now includes some Keiths and a Belknap) likewise draws on our time growing up and our common journeys now.

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needs over the arcs of our time together.

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And to everyone else that has supported me over my 31 years on Earth, thank you!
This study examines the ways in which comprehensive universities seek to contribute to and engage with their cities and regions. By studying three regional comprehensive universities, it uncovers the ways in which leaders and others on campus envision the role of the university in contributing to the community and the strategies put in place to animate this vision. The general regional contributions of these comprehensive universities can be delineated into four overlapping areas: the education of students in line with regional needs; engaging the intellectual resources of the university with the community; regional development; and outreach, volunteering, and fixed spending. Conceptions of the university’s role in two of the universities align with a notion of regional stewardship, as their engagement with the region is in a broad array of areas and allows the community to set priorities for the university’s contributions. The role of the other university is envisioned more narrowly on contributing to the region through the education of its students. The regional stewardship mission offers some advantages, as it legitimizes the work of more individuals on campus and has the potential to offer synergistic and complementary gains.
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

Introduction

Colleges and universities have always played an important role in our nation. Several colonial colleges predate the American Revolution, and from the very beginning these institutions sought to contribute to society. The founders of these early institutions sought to impart “a sense of responsibility and public service” among students (Thelin, 2004, p. 26) and Benjamin Franklin, in founding what would become the University of Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century, sought to found a university that would “draw students of ability from all social strata and actively and purposefully cultivate civic values in these students and provide them with the practical skills necessary to address the pressing problems of the day” (Harkavy & Hartley, 2008, p. 13). In the years that followed, state colleges and universities were established, some with the assistance of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, which sought to provide useful knowledge to communities across the nation. The Wisconsin Idea in the early 20th century sought to bring knowledge from University of Wisconsin professors to help state government run more efficiently. It also implemented a system of extension that included the university’s participation in testing soil, crops, and food; teaching state residents through correspondence courses; and promoting regional dialogues across the state on issues of the day (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). Even the new private research universities established in the late 19th nineteenth and early 20th twentieth centuries, including the University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins University, and Stanford University, included public service and the improvement of society through their research as main goals.
A pillar of the University of Chicago’s mission was “an active ambition to put knowledge to use for human service” (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997, p. 186). Different colleges and universities and the different sectors have sought to serve the nation in different ways throughout the history of American higher education.

In the later part of the twentieth century, a growing number of individuals and organizations sought to reassert the civic purposes of these universities that they felt had been lost (Hartley, 2009; Hartley & Soo, 2009). There were efforts to promote volunteering and then service-learning, and from the 1980s through the beginning of the 21st twenty-first century a number of networks were created to support this work, including Campus Compact, a membership organization of college presidents committed to service-learning that has more than 1,000 members (Hartley, 2009). During these years, a number of groups released reports and formed initiatives seeking to focus attention around the civic dimensions of the university’s mission. In the 1999 Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University there are calls for research universities to restore the public mission of promoting democracy by focusing on the civic education of students, fostering civic dialogue on and off campus, and promoting engaged research and service on these campuses (Boyte & Hollander, 1999). A project by American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), called the American Democracy Project, focuses on student civic engagement, in particular preparation for participation in democratic activities including voting and contributions to public policymaking (Mehaffey, 2008). These two efforts were focused on the promotion of democracy and civic dialogues and attitudes, not necessarily on community engagement or a broad realignment of the
university’s priorities to the community. In *Returning to our Roots: The Engaged Institution*, there is a call for America’s research universities to be engaged through a broad range of activities (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999). There are calls for reciprocity and partnerships, engagement and civic preparation in the curriculum, research to address a range of society’s problems, and incentives and funding to support engagement. With these and other calls for engagement, there are various efforts on campus across the country to reassert these civic purposes and contribute to their cities and regions.

**Comprehensive colleges and universities**

The nature of universities’ societal contribution has always been contested and enacted differently across institutions and sectors. All institutions, public and private (and increasingly the for-profit sector) have a role to play. One sector that is often overlooked is the comprehensive colleges and universities—those regional institutions that are present in cities and towns across the nation, and whose mission and public contributions are tied closely to their regions. In fact, there is not even a reliable definition of this sector! This study focuses on these universities, examining the ways in which leaders at these universities see their regional contributions. It considers their visions for engagement and the strategies they have put in place to make these a reality.

The call to reassert the public dimension of the university’s mission is a salient concern for all universities, but a particular challenge to the public comprehensive colleges and universities. The ever-changing landscape of American higher education is
most often divided into four main sectors based on degree offerings as articulated by the Carnegie Classification system: doctorate-granting universities, master’s colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges, and associate’s colleges although there are also special focus institutions and tribal colleges (McCormick & Zhao, 2005). Doctorate-granting universities, especially the research-intensive universities, have distinctive contributions to the nation, including performing research that advances human understanding in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, and training the next generation of scholars (Geiger, 2004). The associate’s or community college sector provides a point of access for all individuals to a wide array of educational options, including associate degrees that can lead to employment or transfer; adult basic education and English as a Second Language training; and targeted workforce training to impart specific skills needed for employment (Dougherty, 1996). Arguably, the for-profit sector is playing an increasingly important role in serving the public good by providing expanded capacity in associate degrees and certificates that public and not-for-profit institutions currently cannot meet (Tierney, 2010). And the single-focus liberal arts institutions offer a specialized educational opportunity for those who seek a bachelor’s degree in a setting where the “primary end is enlightenment rather than competency in a trade” (Hartley, 2002, p. 6).

The nation’s sector of comprehensive colleges and universities does not have such a clearly defined mission; Youn and Gamson (1994) note “the difficulty of locating these entities on the institutional map of American higher education” (p. 190), and many of its purposes overlap with other sectors. Like community colleges they provide access for students from different backgrounds, including underprepared and nontraditional
students, and provide the array of support services required. They provide a mix of both liberal education and more vocational training. Like the major research institutions, comprehensives perform some research, albeit more applied and applicable to local needs (AASCU, 2002). Yet there is no formal definition of this group of schools, as the sector spans Carnegie Classifications. A definition for this sector includes all four-year institutions that grant baccalaureates in a diverse array of fields (not simply the liberal arts), master’s degrees, and a small number of professional doctorates. Of the roughly 4,000 public and non-profit institutions there are about 1,000 institutions that could be considered comprehensives, granting about half of all bachelor’s and master’s degrees. About a third of these institutions are public, though the publics tend to be larger and grant more degrees than their private counterparts. They are in all 50 states and in rural and urban areas. Because they grant such a large number of baccalaureate degrees, they serve an important role in our nation, as bachelor’s degrees are increasingly important for gaining access to the middle class. In the knowledge-based economy the highest growth occupations are those that require postsecondary education, including a bachelor’s degree (Brint, 2001; Carnevale & Rose, 2011; Council of Economic Advisers, 2009).

Comprehensive colleges and universities offer educational opportunity at a more affordable price than research universities, often educating students from their communities and regions who are unwilling or unable to travel to or pay for institutions that draw statewide or nationally. In addition to the education of students, there are many ways that these comprehensive colleges and universities can serve society. This study aims to explore the myriad ways that these schools contribute to their cities and regions.

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1 For a more detailed explanation of this definition, see Chapter 3.
Though the comprehensive sector is vitally important and potentially able to address some of our national challenges, in the education literature it is an understudied area (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005). The bulk of research attention goes to the research universities (e.g., Geiger, 2004; Rhodes, 2001; Shapiro, 2005) and liberal arts colleges (e.g., Breneman, 1994; Delucci, 1998; Hartley, 2002; Kirp, 2003), both of which capture the attention and imagination of the public. Further, community colleges are increasingly gaining attention, from researchers (e.g., Bailey, 2009; Bailey & Smith Morset, 2006; Bettinger & Long, 2005) and from public policymakers who are focusing on their capacity to increase the number of Americans with postsecondary education (Gates Foundation, 2009; Lumina Foundation, 2009; Obama, 2009).

**Regional contributions and regional stewardship**

Within the sector of regional universities, there is significant diversity in context, history, and mission. One of the hallmarks of the American system of higher education is its diversity, and institutions define their purposes in many different ways. Some have sought to compete on price or convenience, while others have sought to become differentiate themselves as distinctive institutions with a particular focus, such as civic engagement or adult education (Porter, 1998; Townsend et al., 1992). Other comprehensives have sought to emulate more prestigious peers in hopes of gaining prestige or increased financial resources (Morphew, 2002; O’Meara, 2007). Others have sought revenue streams from the market and commercialization ventures (Bok, 2003; Zemsky, Wegner & Massey, 2005). There are pressures on these institutions from many different directions, including financial pressures and decreasing state allocations;
policymakers and system officials who may encourage one or another aspect of the institution’s mission; and increased calls for accountability in the areas of student learning, graduation rates, and the education of underrepresented students (Complete College America, 2011).

One particular way that certain regional comprehensives have sought to define their mission and serve the public is to emphasize their regional roles and contributions. There have been calls to embrace and elevate this regional focus, fostering a commitment to “regional stewardship” (ARS et al., 2006; Jones, 2005). Regional stewardship entails the university being of a particular region, not simply in it. Whereas research universities and flagship state universities are stewards of a global community and research agenda, regional universities can be “stewards of place” and make a commitment to addressing the particular needs of the place in which they are located (AASCU, 2002). As Dennis Jones has observed,

all states, including the geographically smallest and the least populated, are comprised of subregions that differ in every imaginable way—in the nature and maturity of their economies, in their wealth, in the demographic characteristics of their populations, in the nature of their capacities to deal with issues locally, and in their politics. It is inevitable that these subregions will have very different kinds of problems that must be addressed, at least at the level of specifics. For example, all regions may have economic development needs, but in one region this may be reflected in a need for creating jobs, in another for sustaining industries and jobs already there, and in yet another for training a sufficiently skilled workforce to respond to employer demand.

Allowing the needs of these local subregions and communities is a specific role that regional comprehensive universities can play, perhaps a unique role that no other institution in society can play. This can give some of these comprehensive institutions
more clarity of purpose and lead to increased quality and performance in teaching and research (Holland, 2005).

**This study**

This study examines public comprehensive universities that have made regional contributions a priority to determine the ways in which their leaders and others on campus conceive of their public contributions. It examines the visions for engagement at these universities and the strategies that have been put in place to implement these visions. In particular, it examines the notion of regional stewardship as a way in which some universities animate their visions and how this comprehensive vision leads to individuals reporting increased support and commitment to the mission. Further, it explores the way in which a vision such as regional stewardship can lead to synergies and complementary benefits. As such, this study has been guided by the following three research questions:

- How is the university’s role in contributing to the community and region conceived of by leaders, faculty, and others at these comprehensive universities?
- What strategies do these universities employ to animate these conceptions of regional contribution?
- In what way does an integrated regional stewardship vision affect individuals’ perception of their work’s importance, and how can organizational theory help us to understand this effect?
The significance of this study is evident in at least four contributions it makes. First, it provides a definition of the sector, and an in-depth scholarly look at regional comprehensive universities, about which Grubb and Lazerson (2005) observe: the “research on these institutions is exceedingly sparse” (p. 20). In fact, Birnbaum’s (1986) characterization of a quarter century ago still holds today: that comprehensive institutions are “relatively invisible, understudied, and not always fully understood or appreciated by legislatures, potential students, and other internal and external constituencies” (p. 58). Since they grant roughly half of the bachelor’s and master’s degrees in this country, and potentially have the capacity to expand to meet the nation’s need for more degrees and certificates (Callan, 2008), it is important to add to our knowledge of this sector. Second, it focuses on the comprehensive sector’s contribution to the region and engagement with the community, including the notion of regional stewardship. The notion of regional stewardship has gotten little scholarly attention, despite the promise it holds for being an animating idea around which universities can organize themselves. In the limited research that looks specifically at this sector and engagement, much of it examines single programs (e.g., community-university partnerships), not the university’s entire way of engaging. Third, this study contributes by focusing on the role of the vision of the president and the leadership, and considering how vision affects individuals across the campus, including their attitudes and conceptions of their work. Fourth, this study contributes to the higher education literature by examining these universities and their efforts at engagement by applying some lenses from the organizational theory literature that are underutilized in higher education research.
Organization of this dissertation

This introductory chapter provides the broad context for this study and outlines the research questions and their significance. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature in a number of areas, including what we know about comprehensive sector, organizational theory, and regional engagement. Chapter 3 outlines the methods and process used to undertake this study. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 lay out the findings by providing in-depth descriptions of the three universities that are a part of this study. Each chapter includes an overview of the location and context of the university, and describes the ways in which these universities seek to be involved in their communities and regions. Chapter 7 offers an analysis of the general ways in which these universities engage with their communities and then the specific vision for engagement on each campus, including the vision of regional stewardship. Further, it examines the ways in which an expansive regional stewardship vision may support the work of individuals on campus and increase complementary benefits from an integrated approach. Finally, chapter 8 draws some conclusions and outlines implications for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In seeking to understand the ways in which comprehensive universities contribute to their cities and regions, this study builds on the work of generations of scholars in a variety of fields. First this review of the literature considers history and development of comprehensive colleges and universities, and their current state. Next, before thinking about a particular dimension of the university’s mission, we consider the general concept of mission, which has been addressed in the management literature, by sociologists, and philosophers. We then consider the particular aspect of mission that is the focus of much of this dissertation: the ways in which universities contribute to their cities and regions, in particular the notion of regional stewardship. Next, since such a mission must exist within a particular organizational setting, we next examine the literature around organizations, including leadership and the ways in which people make sense of their organization’s mission and purpose.

Comprehensive Colleges and Universities

Comprehensive colleges and universities are an understudied segment of the US higher education landscape (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005). There is a sparse amount of literature that specifically examines this sector of American higher education. Even defining the sector is difficult. While the Carnegie Classification system neatly divides the higher education landscape into the categories of doctorate-granting, master’s colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges, and associate’s colleges, the reality is
that these classifications mask significant differences within categories and blurring
around the edges of the categories. The differences within classifications can be seen, for
example, by examining the varying amount of research conducted at the 283 doctoral-
research universities; the 50 institutions (18% of this classification) that do the most
research receive 63% of federal research money and the top 100 institutions (35%)
receive 85% of that funding (Benjamin, 2003). In addition, there is significant overlap
between schools at the margins; for example, a baccalaureate college might look very
similar to a master’s college that grants bachelor’s degrees along with a handful of
master’s programs. Comprehensive universities can be found within Carnegie
Classifications of baccalaureate colleges that offer programs in a wide array of degree
areas, master’s universities, and even among doctoral universities that primarily grant
professional doctorates.

Comprehensive universities serve a multitude of purposes, hence the name
“comprehensive.” Like major research universities, many comprehensive colleges and
universities do some research, though generally a larger proportion of it is applied and
locally focused, and grant master’s and some professional doctoral degrees. A main
mission of the comprehensives is granting bachelor’s degrees, similar to liberal arts
colleges. Like community colleges and some of the for-profit institutions,
comprehensives also provide an access point to higher education for different groups,
including the underprepared, nontraditional age students, and working students.
Determining the role and purposes of individual institutions is not straightforward; for
example, determining whether to offer a new master’s or doctoral degree program can be
a difficult decision, one in which other local universities and state officials may have
input. Different comprehensive institutions determine their purpose and organizational roles differently. As a professor at a comprehensive universities describes it, “we comprehensive universities are more akin to a herd than to a single beast, for, while we share many characteristics, we have a great many differences as well” (Dalbey, 1994). The term “state comprehensive universities” has been used by Henderson (2007) to refer to this diverse grouping of institutions that are state controlled or funded, and have a purpose that is broad or comprehensive, not single-purpose (e.g., teacher training) or that focus extensively on doctoral degrees. Thus, the role of each comprehensive institution is distinct but overlaps with other sectors of the system, including research universities, community colleges, and liberal arts institutions.

Most comprehensive colleges and universities were started as normal schools or teachers colleges, though some also began as technical schools, schools sponsored by organizations such as the YMCA, and as private liberal arts colleges that became public and expanded their roles (Finnegan, 1990). The first public normal school began in Massachusetts in 1839 (the institution has since become Framingham State College, a comprehensive college offering bachelor’s and master’s degrees) and it was a school—not a college—that educated elementary school graduates to teach in elementary schools (Dunham, 1969). “The word normal means rule, model, or pattern. The job of the normal schools was to give prospective teachers models and rules for teaching” (Dunham, 1969, p. 27). The normal schools emphasized pedagogy and methods of teaching, in addition to child development and school governance. Initially, there were suggestions that teacher training could be handled by providing funding to existing private academies, such as the Academy and Charitable School of Philadelphia in 1749
(which later became the University of Pennsylvania) or private colleges (Dunham, 1969; Finnegan, 1991). Some argued that training teachers in these disparate academies allowed for more local variation, rather than the teacher training institutions with their required and centrally controlled “pedagogic theory” that were seen to be like those in the European systems (Finnegan, 1991, p. 11). However, by 1910, the state-sponsored teacher-education schools became the popular choice for educating teachers and there were 264 normal schools (Dunham, 1969).

There was a gradual shift as normal schools became teachers colleges in the late nineteenth century through the 1920s and 1930s (Finnegan, 1990). The impetus for the shift was at least twofold. First, there was a large expansion of secondary schooling from 1880 through 1920, which meant that more teachers were required who had training in teaching secondary school. Between 1880 and 1930, enrollment in public secondary schools jumped from 110,000 to 4,399,000 students (Harcleroad & Ostar, 1987, p. 35) and so many more teachers were required to teach these students. These teachers needed more education than they received at the normal schools. Unlike normal schools that trained primary school teachers, which taught only pedagogic training to supplement previous training, teachers colleges that educated secondary school teachers required that teachers had training leading to the bachelor’s degree in academic subjects (Harcleroad & Ostar, 1987). Thus, the teachers colleges had expanded offerings in disciplinary subjects in addition to pedagogy (Finnegan, 1991). A second impetus for the shift to teachers colleges was the accreditation process and the push for higher entrance standards for colleges and universities (Finnegan, 1991; Harcleroad & Ostar, 1987). Having higher quality high school graduates—and by extension better teachers to train them—were in
the interests of both colleges and universities and the business and labor community, which supported the efforts of accreditation at both secondary and postsecondary institutions (Harcleroad & Ostar, 1987). Accreditors, for example, required that secondary school instructors could be certified in no more than two or three subject areas.

The mission of teachers colleges continued to evolve, with an expanding notion of their missions and purposes. First, there was an increase in the number of departments, reflecting the disciplinary array of traditional universities. In addition to those who taught pedagogy, faculty were hired with training in their specific disciplines. Second, master’s degrees in teaching became more prevalent, a precursor to the large number of master’s degrees that many comprehensive schools would begin to offer (Harcleroad & Ostar, 1987). Third, these colleges began to train an increasing number of students that were not planning to become teachers. With the expanded numbers of high school graduates, teachers colleges became institutions for students to get a bachelor’s degree if they did not have the resources to travel far for schooling. These students, including an increasing number who did not plan to become teachers, entered these colleges, seeking classes in a variety of fields. In the case of California, it was by statute that teachers colleges were granted permission in 1935 to offer degrees other than teacher degrees (Harcleroad & Ostar, 1987).

Teachers colleges were a relatively short-lived phenomenon, since around World War II and shortly thereafter most transitioned into state colleges. The average time that institutions were called teachers colleges was 24 years, with most of the changes completed by 1960 (Henderson, 2007; Ogren, 2005). The transition to institutions with broader purposes was accelerated by the post-World War II influx of veterans. There
was a surge in male enrollments, many of whom were unable to travel far for higher education, creating “an immediate demand for regional opportunities in curricula other than teacher education” (Harcleroad & Ostar, 1987, p. 62). The increased attention to higher education surrounding the Sputnik launch in 1957 brought additional resources to higher education, including comprehensive universities. Further, because of a major increase in research activities at the nation’s research universities—particularly in basic research—there was an increasingly clear distinction between those research universities and the comprehensive institutions, which focused more on teaching undergraduates and master’s-level education. “This major postwar change in the emphasis and efforts of the public land-grant institutions and the public state universities has been an important factor in the need to develop the comprehensive, publicly supported state colleges and universities emphasizing high quality undergraduate and master’s level education (Harcleroad & Ostar, 1987, p. 69).

One issue that has persisted at comprehensive institutions throughout their histories has been the question of status and prestige. The relatively low status of these institutions has at least two causes: first, many have grown from teacher training institutions, which often have lower status in the academy (Labaree, 2004), or other low-status institutions, such as two-year colleges that expanded to become comprehensives (Henderson, 2007). Second, the activities in which these institutions participate do not generate prestige by traditional measures; funded research, selective admissions policies, and major fundraising are simply not a part of the comprehensive institution’s portfolio. In spite of this, many comprehensive institutions have sought to engage in prestige-enhancing activities to increase their broader or national reputations (Henderson, 2007).
Institutions seeking prestige for its sake alone risk making tradeoffs, in some cases without being aware of it (O’Meara, 2007). Institutional resources are often directed to administration, research facilities, or amenities with the hope, often unrealized, of greater institutional prestige or resources. Striving has long been evident, including as far back as Dunham’s (1969) observations after visiting a number of comprehensive colleges, which he noted seemed to be emulating more established and “better” institutions. His observation from that study would still be relevant today: “It does seem disappointing for this very large group of diverse institutions to be emulating a relatively small group of prestige places” (p. 156-157). There are institutions that have sought to separate the notion of excellence from that of prestige. Whereas the most selective institutions, those with the most prestige, are commonly thought of as being “the best,” others have argued that excellence and status do not necessarily go together. Michael Crow, the president of Arizona State University, has argued that many people set up a false dichotomy between “those [universities] that focus on academic excellence and discovery, and those that focus on access” (Crow, 2007, p. 3). He argues that a university can focus on excellence while still providing educational opportunities to many students.

Today’s comprehensive colleges and universities generally grant a large number of both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in a wide variety of subject areas, and are increasingly offering doctorates in professionally oriented disciplines. While these institutions “are comprehensive institutions offering both liberal arts and professional programs, they clearly emphasize preparing students for careers” (Birnbaum, 1986, p. 62). Further, they must be more responsive to student needs and demands of enrollment, since they are tuition-dependent, not buttressed by large endowments or a wealthy donor
The role of comprehensive institutions is evolving in our increasingly global and knowledge-dependent society. The labor market is expanding for those with more education, as many jobs that had previously been low-skilled have been mechanized and the jobs that replaced them require more education (Carnevale & Rose, 2011; Matthews & Carnevale, 2009). Much of the scholarly research and public attention focuses on the role of research universities in addressing the world’s biggest problems, but an overemphasis on this risks overlooking how comprehensive universities can solve other problems—those of application and innovation. There has also been an increased focus from policymakers on innovation (e.g., Duncan, 2010), but innovation requires a broadly educated population, not simply those who staff the research universities. In their book *Engines of Innovation*, Thorp and Goldstein (2010) argue that the new economy after the Great Recession will require innovation as the central way to promote growth, and point to Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter, characterizing his analysis that “America urgently needs a coherent economic strategy based in large part upon our strengths in innovation, entrepreneurship, and higher education” (p. 1). Thorp and Goldstein’s conclusions, however, is that the American research university is the answer: “the nation’s research universities are expected by those who support them and the public at large to lead the way as far as innovation is concerned” (p. 3). While it is undoubtedly true that research universities are a major contributor to America’s innovative capacity, Thorp and Goldstein (and others) do a disservice to the broader system of higher education by assuming that the research universities are the only educational institutions that can provide for this innovation. In fact, in the article by Michael Porter that Thorp
and Goldstein reference, while Porter (2008) mentions universities and their support for innovation, he does not specify that this only means research universities, and he also highlights the importance of expanding access to a university education for more students. A call for a more innovative economy will require the support of our nation’s research universities, but other sectors, such as the comprehensive institutions, will also promote and add to this capacity.

The literature about comprehensive universities is sparse and in need of attention. There are few researchers who have turned their attention to what is a very important sector of the American higher education system. The last research-based book about the sector was Dunham’s (1969) book, *Colleges of the Forgotten Americans*, in which he traveled to several institutions and outlined the state of this growing sector of institutions. While his book is rather dated today, he nonetheless drew several astute conclusions about the sector that hold true today, including their tendency to strive to emulate their more prestigious peers. Henderson (2008) wrote about the sector in *Teaching at the Peoples University* with a descriptive characterization designed for those interested in teaching at a comprehensive college or university. There is little sustained attention to this sector, other than fleeting mentions of comprehensive colleges and universities in other research.

**Mission and purposes of education**

*Understanding institutional mission*

Each college or university has a unique mission and purpose, and this study
considers the public purposes of comprehensive colleges and universities. However, before considering this particular aspect of a university’s mission, we must first consider how we understand an institution’s mission and purposes. While each institution has a mission statement, coming to understand an institution’s mission is not as (word omitted?) reading this statement. Having a well-defined mission has been recommended in both the management (e.g., Drucker, 1974; Duck, 2001; Kotter, 1996; Pfeffer, 1992; Selznick, 1957) and higher education literature (Bryson, 1995; Chafee, 1984; Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1991; Clark, 1970; Drucker, 1989; Hunt, Stevens, & Loudon, 1997; Keller, 1983). Yet, we find that mission statements often do not have the suggested clarity; in fact, studies of college and university mission statements have often characterized them as vague, lacking specificity, and full of high-flung rhetoric. They are described as “amazingly vague, evasive, or rhetorical… full of honorable verbiage signifying nothing” (Newsom and Hays, 1990), “vague and vapid” (Chait, 1979), and “hallowed abstractions about teaching, research, and service” (Morrill, p. 136). Mission statements, however, may be useful in ways other than simply outlining a university’s exact purposes and goals. Morphew and Hartley (2006) note that these documents can serve important and complex symbolic roles, including to signal external and internal stakeholders and to communicate the ways in which the institution is fulfilling the roles expected of it.

It is often the case that universities have many competing, even contradictory roles, and the varied nature of the university’s mission brings challenges to understanding and assessing the university: “The complexity and multiple, sometimes competing, interests within the university remind us of how difficult it is to observe its many
activities and, thus, to gauge its performance” (Weisbroad, Ballou, & Asch, 2008, p. 23).
Clark Kerr, the renowned chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley and the
director of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, noted that American
universities are “pluralistic” institutions, in contrast to more teaching-focused Oxford or
strictly research-based German universities of the past (Kerr, 2001, p. 103). Often the
missions of these institutions have multiple dimensions, some of which are
complementary and others that conflict or create tensions. While broad consensus can
often be achieved on large goals, making specific decisions about organizational
structure, financing, and activities involves a more difficult conversation (Schein, 2004).
For example, there may be consensus that a research university should be engaged in the
triumvirate of teaching, research, and service, but how should the demands of research be
balanced against teaching loads? Digging deeper, it becomes clear that even within these
goals there are contradictions and tensions: How much research is enough? What kind
of research? Is classified research acceptable; or research for a pharmaceutical company
that imposes a hold time before publication? Should community-based research be
supported by a special community engagement fund? These questions demonstrate that
while there may be broad consensus that “research” is a good thing, attempting to
operationalize or decide on the proper balance is more difficult.

Other management theorists have noted institutions often have a cascading
hierarchy of goals. Herbert Simon (1957/1997) writes about a limited number of goals
that are ends in and of themselves, in addition to the smaller subgoals that make up these
larger ones. Simon calls these main purposes “ultimate goals,” with other goals
subordinate to them. “The ultimate goals—making a profit, achieving growth,
prolonging life—are those which, by definition, are not viewed as means to ends, but as ends in themselves” (Scott, 1981, p. 74). All other goals or actions undertaken by the organization should have a “means-end chain” leading to one of the ultimate goals (Scott, 1981, p. 73). For example, a main goal for a university may be a commitment to high-quality research; supporting this main goal may be fostering a community of free academic inquiry and exchange, which may in turn be nurtured by sufficient resources and tenure for professors. Thus, tenure is not an end in itself, but rather a means to support the ultimate goal of research. Simon (1957/1997) recognizes that in reality, ultimate goals and their supporting goals are not always straightforward or simple to understand. “Often the connections between organizational activities and ultimate objectives is obscure, or these ultimate objectives are incompletely formulated or there are internal conflicts and contradictions among the ultimate objectives, or among the means selected to attain them” (Simon, 1957/1997, p. 74). Simon’s description of obscure and conflicting goals seems particularly relevant to higher education.

Differing viewpoints on the purposes of education

Colleges and universities exist to serve many purposes, most often summarized in the mantra of “teaching, research, and service.” However, this only scratches the surface of a university’s mission: teaching encompasses both undergraduate and graduate education, supporting the transmission of knowledge, training of minds, and inspiring the next generation of scholars, researchers, and leaders. Research includes basic scientific research that may lead to long-term and fundamental advances in human understanding, research that translates these developments, such as cures for diseases, and applied
research that helps communities and individuals benefit from such advances; social science research that broadens our understanding of social, political, or economic phenomena; and research in the humanities that enriches our understanding of the human condition and ponders questions of truth and beauty. Finally, colleges and universities serve society through direct engagement with their communities and the world; by meeting the needs of the society and workforce in terms of employment and leadership training, and providing for social mobility; and also through their roles as “sanctuaries of nonrepression,” where individuals have the freedom to explore ideas and offer critiques of society without the fear of punishment (Gutmann, 1987, p. 174). Each institution’s mission includes some of these purposes, and the ways in which different sectors and institutions combine these goals gives our system its diversity.

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have discussed and debated the appropriate balance of various missions at universities and the university’s place in society. For example, Stanley Fish (2008) has argued that the university should focus its attention solely on teaching and research and avoid forays into other activities such as service, civic engagement, or ethical development. Fish’s ideas have echoes of early 20th century educator Abraham Flexner (1930), who acknowledged that in the process of their other work, faculty members and the university may be engaged with society; but, he argued, this is not their primary mission.

The professor of medicine needs patients, just as the social scientist needs his environment. The professor of medicine ought to be thoroughly humane, realizing fully that he is dealing with, and in that sense responsible for, human life. But the professor of medicine is primarily a student of problems and a trainer
of men. He has not the slightest obligation to look after as many sick people as he can; on the contrary, the moment he regards his task as that of caring for more and more of the sick, he will cease to discharge his duty to the university—his duty to study problems, to keep abreast of literature, to make his own contributions to science, to train men who can “carry on” (page. 16).

This view of the university sees engagement as an incidental byproduct, not a main mission. Most scholars argue for a broader public purpose. Derek Bok (1982, 1991, 2005) outlines a vision of the university that values research, teaching, and service and engages students and faculty members with the wider society; the university has a responsibility and the mission to improve the human condition. Others argue that the university has a main role in responding to an array of societal challenges, such as focusing on the need to reform the K-16 educational system or increase the nation’s human capital (Benjamin, 2003; Keller, 2008). Going even further, Giroux and Giroux (2004) argue that the university must attempt to redress all social ills from racism to inequity and alter structures that simply seek to reproduce the existing social order.

Likewise, scholars have noted the importance of the university serving in a role as social critic; Pusser (2006) argues that universities should serve the role of “public spheres,” where “public interaction, conversation, and deliberation can take place, and where the nature of the state and private interests can be debated and contested” (p. 18). These thinkers and others (e.g., Levin, 2003; Shapiro, 2005) have different responses to questions about the mission of the university.

Philosophers of education have also written about the proper role of the university in society, and articulated a number of ways in which educational activities can be
aligned with different conceptions of justice. Fulinwider and Litchtengerg (2005) argue that universities, as public trusts, must act in ways that conform to the demands of justice, and as such decisions about whom to admit or how to allocate resources must be made in that context. For example, the allocation of admissions slots in selective institutions is part of a gatekeeping function that grants access to the elite rungs of our society; individuals should be admitted on grounds related to legitimate educational needs (e.g., academic preparation or diversity of contributions), whereas admissions decisions based on spurious or unrelated grounds (e.g., a large donation) would be against the demands of justice (Gutmann, 1987). As such, decisions about allocating resources should be considered in terms of which would better promote the university’s legitimate academic functioning. In a differing notion, Elizabeth Anderson (2007) argues that failing to educate our nation’s elite with an intimate familiarity with the experiences of the poor is necessarily unjust and that this exposure can only come through personal interaction with the poor as their peers in college; thus, she argues that a university’s student body must contain a large percentage of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. While not cloaked in the language of mission, these philosophers and others are making arguments about the components of a university and what purposes it must serve. The ideas of these philosophers have largely been absent from the conversation about mission in higher education.

**Community engagement and regional stewardship**

One aspect of a university’s mission is its contribution to the public good.

Especially for public comprehensive universities, serving the city and region is a very
important role. There is wide and significant literature in higher education concerning community engagement, including its growth and best practices. However, the unit of analysis for many of these studies is at the individual or unit level (e.g., faculty engagement or the engagement of a particular center), or on specific practices such as service-learning (e.g., Bringle & Hatcher, 2000), community partnerships (e.g., Cooley & Coli, 2005), and democratic and civic engagement (e.g., Sax, 2000). There are few studies that focus specifically on comprehensive institutions, with case studies of individual institutions of varying type the most prevalent (e.g., Maurrasse, 2001; Peters et al., 2005), followed by those focused only on research institutions (Kellogg Commission, 2000; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008).

The notion of community engagement has undergone changes since the 1990s; previously there had been an emphasis on “service” and “outreach,” which were seen as one-way approach to helping communities (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). In this model, the university was seen as the expert with the answers, which were then shared with the community, who needed help. Ernest Boyer’s (1990) publication of *Scholarship Reconsidered* and other conversations in the 1990s began to change the notion of the university’s interaction with the community to more of a two-way model, which was characterized by collaboration, partnerships, and the community’s input on the research and activities of the university. The work took on the descriptors of “community engagement” or “public engagement”; the moniker “civic engagement” is often conflated, though it more precisely tends to describe activities that aim at promoting the civic development of students and the community (Beere, Votruba, & Wells, 2011). In the 1990s the concept of metropolitan universities was advanced, and in the first decade
of the 2000s, the term “regional stewardship” was advanced; both of which will be discussed below and they suggest broad and deep engagement with a particular region.

While many scholars look at the actions and activities of engagement, some scholars have looked at the ways in which these activities become institutionalized or embedded at the university (e.g., Hartley, Harkavy, & Benson, 2002; Beere, Votruba, & Wells, 2011). There have been multiple matrices or checklists that call for engagement in areas across the university (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Holland, 1997; ARS et al., 2006). For example, Holland (1997) argues that engagement should be a consideration in many areas of the university, including the mission, organizational structure, faculty and community involvement, and in university policies. Underlying this and other checklists is the assumption that engagement activities must be spread throughout the campus. O’Meara (2003) notes that to test for institutionalization, scholars should look for engagement across the four frames presented by Bolman and Deal (1997) in Reframing Organizations: the structural, political, human resource, and symbolic frames. These tools can be useful as a way to see the broad areas that should be engaged and to help campus leaders evaluate their campuses; however, without an in-depth understanding of a campus, it is often difficult to gauge the level of embeddedness. For example, a university may have a civic engagement center, but there is a lot of variation in the quality, staffing levels, and amount of buy-in or support from faculty; thus without gaining an in-depth understanding of an institution, it is hard to properly evaluate its work around regional engagement (Soo & Hartley, 2009).

There has been little research on engagement specifically at comprehensive colleges and universities. Holland (2005) briefly touches on this sector, arguing that
community engagement work might be particularly successful or relevant at comprehensive universities, where research has not traditionally been the key metric on which faculty are measured, potentially allowing for engaged work to be a indicator on which faculty are assessed. However, she notes that because the research university model tends to be used as a measure of success for all universities, the lack of appreciation and prestige given to community engagement has a “dampening effect” for all institutions, including comprehensives (p. 254). She further calls for more research, particularly “cross-institutional research”, about engagement at various institutions (p. 257). Ramaley (2000) reflects on the role of comprehensives in community engagement, though her sprawling chapter does not give us a general look at how comprehensives might best engage with their communities. She does make the bold assertion that the comprehensive institution is the “only societal entity” that can address the problems our country faces at the local, state, and national levels, especially in collaboration with other partner organizations. In his book about teaching at comprehensive universities, Teaching at the People’s University, Henderson (2007) mentions some ways in which engagement happens at these universities, though there is not an in-depth examination of this angle. Thus while the literature touches on how regional comprehensive universities can be engaged in the region, there has yet to be a thorough exploration of their role in community engagement work.

Some scholars have noted the ways in which networks and relationships impact engagement work. Hollander and Hartley (2000) note the ways in which national networks promoted the work of civic engagement. They explain, for example, how the service-learning movement was advanced and promoted by a number of national
networks. In addition to higher education organizations (e.g., Campus Compact, AAC&U, NERCHE), they outline a role for foundations, the federal government, and networks of individuals on campuses who are engaged in similar activities (e.g., networks of individuals working with community partners). A different methodological path is taken by Bringle and Hatcher (2002), who examine campus-community partnerships not as large networks, but from the perspective of didactic personal relationships. They observe the ways in which these professional, working relationships mimic interpersonal relationships, including through the stages of initiation, development, maintenance, and dissolution.

*Regional focus and regional stewardship*

One way of animating a university’s public role is through the concept of regional stewardship. In spite of arguments that the world is more globalized and flat, with people and information flowing freely across the world, economists and regional planners have argued both that the region and location are more important than ever (Florida, 2002; Friedman, 2006; Porter, 1998; Reich, 2002). Michael Porter (1998) argues that regions and place remain important as bases from which contributions to the global economy can be made: “The enduring competitive advantages in a global economy are often heavily local, arising from concentrations of highly specialized skills and knowledge, institutions, rivals, related businesses, and sophisticated customers… The more the world economy becomes complex, knowledge based, and dynamic the more this is true” (p. 90). Likewise Richard Florida (2006) argues that fostering a city and region in which there are educated and creative individuals is a key driver of growth. Florida argues that the main
contribution of a university is not through the commercialization of IT or direct economic development, but rather contributing to the presence of workers in region who are working in the creative economy, “which includes science and technology; the arts, culture, and entertainment; and knowledge-based professions like law, finance, health care, and education” (Florida, 2006). They suggest, along with Reich (2002), that universities that contribute to their cities and regions make an important contribution by educating students and attracting knowledge workers and development to a region.

As economists and regional planners were articulating the importance of place and regions, there has been a renewed interest in the university’s role in the community in the higher education literature. Some individuals and groups advocating community engagement began to see a role for regional stewardship, arguing that the region’s needs should drive the university’s priorities. In 1996, Ernest Boyer outlined a vision of the university that addresses the pressing needs of the society, including our cities and regions. “[T]he scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, and to our cities” (p. 19-20). Like many others, he argues that there are pressing societal problems that the university can and should address. However, the traditional ways in which universities address societal problems involves researchers first recognizing societal problems, then addressing them through their disciplinary or scholarly lens, and then publishing their findings in their discipline’s journal, preferably the most influential in the discipline. In contrast, those who advocate for regional stewardship argue that the problems of the region should help to drive the priorities of the university, and the measure of success should depend less on the number of publications
of the faculty, but more on the degree to which the regional problems are addressed. Note that this imperative to address regional problems does not ignore the need for scholarship and publishing; it simply recognizes that this is not the only or primary metric for success. Universities that seek to be regional stewards, therefore, cannot simply turn out graduates or even simply produce research that may happen to be relevant to the community. Instead, a university with a regional stewardship orientation will see the needs of the community and use its resources to address these issues. Michael Crow, the president of Arizona State University, emphasizes that the region’s needs must considered. “Universities must not only create knowledge and programs with a greater utility, but also direct resources toward activities that meet both specific and general community needs” (p. 96). It is not simply enough to have useful knowledge; it must be the useful knowledge that the region needs.

The concept of regional stewardship and university-wide engagement has been evolving for a number of years. It is very similar to the concept of “metropolitan universities” that became popularized by Ernest Lynton (1995). Metropolitan universities are those that have “a philosophy and a commitment rather than a specific institutional blue print” (Lynton, 1995, p. xxi). The idea of a metropolitan university is one in which a metropolitan area—both the urban and the “whole metropolitan area” become an important focus of the university’s work, not simply the location where the university physically sits (Hathaway, Mulhollan, & White, 1995). A 2002 report entitled Stepping Forward as Stewards of Place by the American Association for State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) introduced the concept of regional stewardship, which more explicitly outlined some of the regional responsibilities the university would take on. The
report observed that “[p]ublic engagement is not a novel concept for today’s state colleges and universities. Historically, these institutions have recognized that they have considerable resources to contribute to the economic, social, and cultural development of their respective regions” (p. 11). However, that report began to outline specific strategies that a regionally engaged university would follow. These ranged from individual actions, such as promoting service learning, faculty engagement, and professional development to realigning the priorities of the institution around regional needs and encouraging public policy to support university-wide engagement. Perhaps most importantly it restated the need for a commitment to region and place as priorities for these regional universities:

Further, we in public higher education need to send the message that, as an advanced knowledge resource, our colleges and universities must be actively engaged in the enhancement of their communities and regions. In so doing, these institutions will benefit as well and increase the nation’s ability to educate students for their roles in the New Economy. Building on that legacy, public engagement can be the defining direction for our future (AASCU, 2002, p. 12).

The report, however, read as a veritable laundry list of ways that universities could become involved in their communities and lacked a simple or easily understood message. Thus, a follow-up report published in 2006 entitled Tools and Insights for Universities Called to Regional Stewardship (ARS et al., 2006) provided a necessary discussion of the unifying theme of “regional stewardship.” This report was published by AASCU along with the Alliance for Regional Stewardship and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and it outlines regional stewardship as a concept around which universities could structure their work.

The report Tools and Insights makes the case that a university that seeks to foster regional stewardship must shed the traditional notion of serving the community, region,
or state by simply providing services and resources within the traditional university construct with the same priorities and goals. Instead, the university must integrate itself with the region by allowing regional concerns to become a guiding and central part of the university’s work. As the report notes, this cannot come simply by adding new programs or services.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the time has come for a new model, not a tune-up. It is not clear that the traditional university has the mission, the culture, or the might to play the role that it must play today in the regional economy, that of being more attuned to local challenges and more responsible for community success (ARS et al., 2006, p. 6).

In this articulation, regional stewardship means engaging in a broad-based effort that spans the university, recognizing the pressing needs of the region and putting them at the center of its agenda, and working closely with other community leaders, policymakers, and citizens. Thus, the regional stewardship mission is not unique to institutions of higher learning; yet universities have a unique set of resources (e.g., faculty, degree programs in various areas) that enables them to contribute significantly to regional stewardship (ARS et al., 2000; ICIC, 2000; Porter, 2001). Further, the report notes: “it is important to remember that regional stewardship is not a task or a project. It is an orientation” (ARS et al., 2006, p. 4).

Whether the regional stewardship role is appropriate for any, some, or all universities is a notion up for debate. As noted above, Stanley Fish would argue that the university should be engaged in teaching and learning and not with regional development plans. Even Derek Bok and others who see a role for the university in contributing to society might feel uneasy about letting the needs of the community drive university priorities to the degree to which advocates of regional stewardship might argue. On the
other hand, it is possible that regional stewardship might be a role that can be played by a
certain subset of institutions; perhaps it is more in line with the mission of a public
regional comprehensive university and not a private research or liberal arts institution.
Such schools might find other ways in which they serve the public.

Organizations and leadership

Organizational theory: Studying organizations and their environments

The enactment of the university’s public purpose or a vision such as regional
engagement occurs within an organization—in particular a college or university that
exists within a particular environment. In the 20th century, the study of organizations and
their environments became a site of considerable scholarly and research attention. Early
ways of understanding organizations focused on organizations as rational systems that
could be designed to work efficiently, reliably, and productively (Scott, 2004). Taylor
(1911/1996) predicted that through “scientific management” the output of workers could
be “obtained with absolute regularity” (Taylor 1911/1996). Social scientists later noted
that organizations and their functioning were in fact more complex, and Scott (2004)
notes that they “began to challenge the conception of organization as dominated by
rational, instrumental behavior” (p. 2). Selznick (1948) noted a “fundamental paradox”
between thinking of organizations as existing as rational systems yet also existing within
an “institutional matrix” of interconnected and embedded connections (p. 25). Gouldner
(1959) suggested a dichotomy between organizations as “rational systems” that can be
systemically shaped and manipulated, as opposed to organizations as “natural systems”
that are “organic systems seeking survival, as collectivities that evolve via spontaneous,
indeterminate processes” (Scott, 2004, p. 3). While this dichotomy is still apparent in the
thinking of organizational theorists today, “most contemporary scholars seem content to
work somewhere within the space anchored by these two poles” (Scott, 2004, p. 4). A
later development in organizational theory was the greater consideration of the
environment in which these organizations operated, which came to be known as
organizations as open systems (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1967).

Management theorists have organized their conceptions of organizations into a
number of different camps or theoretical perspectives for how organizations should
structure themselves in relation to the environment. These perspectives differ in their
extent to which they see organizations as more or less rational, open to environmental
effects to varying degrees, or are seen more as structures, bundles of routines, or symbols.
For example, contingency theory argues that organizations are shaped by their
environments, and since different kinds of organizations and industries operate in
different environments, there will be differences in their organizations, structures, and
ways of operating (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Scott, 2004). Those organizations that
structure themselves to most effectively match their environment will be most successful.
Resource dependence theory, likewise, focuses on the environment’s effects on an
organization, but notes the political dynamics and differences in power that arise between
Organizations should thus ensure that they do not become dependent on people or other
organizations, and that they manage their power relations in their external dealings.
Institutional theorists also see the need for organizations to adapt based on their
environment, but they argue that organizations exist within an institutionalized field, and
they gain legitimacy and ultimately success if they adopt and take cues from the norms in the institutional field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

As there is a dichotomy when thinking about organizations between those that are rational or machine-like and those that are more fluid, so too are there differences when thinking about change processes. Some explain organizational change as rational, linear, or progressing through stage theories. Kezar (2001) calls these “teleological” approaches to change, in which organizations make plans and act in ways that are “purposeful and adaptive” (p. 33). For example, Duck (2001) articulates a five-stage process for change, in which the organization moves through Stagnation, Preparation, Implementation, Determination, and Fruition. While she acknowledges that change processes often do not take a linear or perfectly planned path, she nonetheless offers a typology that she thinks can guide the change process at many organizations. Likewise, Kotter (1995) notes eight phases to the change process; he argues that “the change process goes through a series of phases that, in total, usually require a considerable length of time. Skipping steps creates only the illusion of speed and never produces a satisfying result” (p. 59).

Other scholars reject the notion that change can be neatly planned and implemented. Those with a social constructivist perspective argue that since organizations and their change processes are constructed by collective notions of reality, change processes must engage different individuals and groups. Lueddeke (1999) articulates a constructivist approach to organizational change in higher education, in which the process of identifying the necessary change and its process is a “social, dialogical process” that engages many different people and constituencies in the organization (p. 252). In this approach, the change process and actions cannot be
separated from the process, and this process must be participatory and not simply prescriptive. Likewise, Neuman (1995) examined the constructivist leadership style of one president that made changes not through a formal “change process,” but rather by changing the attitudes that people held toward the institution. The president changed the way that people felt about the institution by articulating a vision that he had constructed with members of the college and by inviting others to rethink and change their understanding of the institution. By engaging community members in the process, yet framing it, he was able to have an impact on the (meaning making??) of various members of the university community. These constructivist theorists reject the notion that change can happen in a predetermined, structured process that can be centrally planned and then implemented.

Frames for studying organizations

As organizational theorists have advanced the scholarly understanding of organizations, others have sought to synthesize this disparate work, making it useful for practitioners and those who use this scholarship to study organizations. Bolman and Deal (2003) articulate a framework with four lenses through which an organization can be understood. Their frames—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic—offer scholars and managers varied perspectives through which to consider an organization; they underscore that without viewing organizations from these multiple angles they risk an incomplete picture of the organizations. The structural frame considers the organization from the perspective of organizational charts and structures, objectives and goals, and efficiency (Bolman & Deal, 2003). It draws on the tradition of Taylor
(1911/1996) and the more rational conception of organizations. Yet while the structural frame emphasizes the presence of rules and structures, it is not necessarily inflexible, as organizations and structures can be designed to include flexibility and autonomy.

The human resource frame analyzes organizations from the perspective that the workers and people who work at the organization are vital and valued assets (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Contrary to the view that they are pawns to do the work prescribed by management, a human resource perspective of the organization argues that the best performance will come from fostering, not exploiting employees. Jeffery Pfeffer, a management professor at Stanford, studies high-performing firms and has found that those who make smart investments in their employees can yield impressive performance. Pfeffer (1998) notes that in many cases “senior managers of the most successful firms worry more about their people and about building learning, skill, and competence in their organizations than they do about having the right strategy” (p. 5). Thus, the human resource frame suggests that improving firm performance cannot exclusively be determined by looking at the structures on the organizational chart or the strategic and management approaches put in place, but it requires a commitment to the people and their self actualization and the skills and resources invested in them.

The third way in which Bolman and Deal suggest observing organizations is through the political frame. This frame suggests that organizations are places where there are many and competing groups with different interests, all competing for scarce resources; through conflict, jockeying, and negotiating the different parties can set priorities and move their agendas forward. Unlike the notion of a rationally planned and perfectly implemented organization, this frame suggests that organizations are places
where power—from either the “top” or from different parts of the organization—can come to dominate the agenda. This can have major implications for those seeking to lead organizations. Especially for those organizations that are not hierarchical and that are loosely coupled, such as universities, building a coalition to implement a set of goals or priorities may be particularly important. The former president of Harvard University, Larry Summers, was unable to hold onto that position when his support among the faculty eroded; while he was still at the “top” of the organizational chart, in the political arena of a large research university, the president was unable to withstand the political currents.

The symbolic frame recognizes the importance of symbols and culture in organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2003). It recognizes that myths, symbols, and values can hold important meaning, defining how individuals within and outside the organization define and understand it. These and other tools can hold significant meaning, giving purpose to the work of individuals, strengthening their attachment to the organization, and making new members feel welcome. This frame draws from institutional theory, which notes the importance of the perception of acting appropriately for gaining legitimacy; for example, simply having a strategic plan may confer legitimacy regardless of its content because it signifies to internal and external audiences that the organization is serious about planning and it can use language and cues to signal certain constituencies. This frame also draws from studies of organizational culture (addressed in more detail below), as an organizational culture is dependent on a common way of operating and set of assumptions, which are communicated through symbols, rituals, and shared myths.
These frames are helpful tools in looking at organizations, though none of the frames alone explains or is sufficient for understanding an organization or its change process; often multiple frames will be valuable and contribute different parts of a more complete understanding. Hartley’s (2009) analysis of the leadership styles of individuals in the civic engagement movement likewise found that leadership typologies were helpful for getting a big-picture understanding, but that neat delineation is often not possible. “[T]he leadership types delineated in the literature are best understood as archetypes describing kinds of actions that influence broad-based change efforts, not qualities embodied by particular individuals. In practice, they are often inextricably entwined” (p. 333). Bolman and Deal’s frames, thus, give us one typology for considering organizations, including colleges and universities, thought they do not promise to fully explain all aspects of organizations.

**Strategy and institutional theory**

Two organizational theory concepts that seem particularly relevant to the work of universities and their engagement work are strategy and the institutionalized nature of higher education. Colleges and universities today are facing the need to make changes, though change is often not easy to come by in these institutions. The university model has persisted for centuries, and academic institutions often pride themselves in not adopting passing fads on a whim (Reisman, 1957, p. 39). The literature around strategy assumes that leaders have a certain amount of agency and control over the direction of their organizations, and that they can determine—or at least help to determine—a best direction to accomplish their goals. Alternatively, the institutional theory literature
foregrounds the importance of structures and activities conforming to predetermined notions of what is legitimate. While neither of these perspectives can fully explain the ways in which engagement activities are structured and implemented at colleges and universities, they can nonetheless be helpful in trying to understand these activities.

One of the most important elements of an organization’s work—a business or a university—is the process of developing a strategy for attaining the organization’s goals. While the phrase “strategic planning” is used with impunity in management (Mintzberg, 1998)—and in higher education—the notion of strategy has a much more precise and systematic meaning in the organizational theory literature. The strategy process includes coming to articulate a set of goals for the organization and then aligning the organization to attain these goals. It is a process of “synthesis” that results in “a not-too-precisely articulated vision of the enterprise” (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 108). In fact, Minzberg writes, “The most successful strategies are visions, not plans” (p. 107). A common mistake leaders make is focusing only on operational effectiveness, rather than strategy (Porter, 1996). While operational effectiveness can be important to ensure that organizations perform their functions well, it focuses on performing current functions better and does not imagine other alternative possibilities. Even the most successful organizations must consider whether or not the strategy is best aligned to meet the needs and goals of the organization. Strategic thinking entails seeking to perform different activities or to perform activities in different ways or combinations that will be more successful (Porter, 1996). An important concept in strategy is that of fit: the actions undertaken by the organization must fit the organization itself (e.g., the organization’s culture or history) and all actions must fit with one another in order to be most successful. Porter (1996)
outlines three types of fit: first-order fit, which measures the connection between actions and the overall strategy. Second-order fit measures the extent to which actions are reinforcing and work well together. Third-order fit is optimization, when there is coordination and information exchange, and where overlap is avoided and where all actions are directed toward optimizing performance.

Organizational theorists can use the theoretical and visual tool of the “fitness landscape” to consider the success of organizations of attaining fit between their strategy and the optimal level of performance. At its simplest, a fitness landscape is smooth, with just one peak—one optimal level of performance. The collective improvements in elements of the strategy will help to move the organization to the attainment of this level of performance. Other fitness landscapes are not smooth and have many peaks; this is known as a rugged fitness landscape. In a rugged fitness landscape, each peak represents “a consistent set of practices” (G&L, 119); the task of strategists is to determine which peak—which collection and arrangement of strategies—would be optimal for the organization. For example, a university’s printing services might have a smooth fitness landscape for the goal of the unit to lower costs. Incremental improvements, such as buying more efficient machines or streamlining the ordering and delivery processes, might bring the unit closer to the optimal level of performance. Likewise, a measure of productivity of faculty research output at a university might have a relatively smooth fitness landscape. In a loosely coupled university, the productivity of the engineering department has little impact on that of the English department, so increases in any department’s productivity will move the university closer to an optimal level of performance.
A more rugged fitness landscape becomes evident when different aspects of a strategy are interrelated and there are many different configurations that might be preferable. For example, the dining services unit of a university might have a more rugged fitness landscape if success is measured in maximizing profit. While increasing operational efficiency through improving purchasing or delivery of services might lead to improvements, there are many interrelated factors that could increase performance. For example, management could decide to build a new dining hall in a high-traffic area, spend more money on healthful and organic foods with the idea to attracting a different segment of students who usually eat elsewhere, or decentralize operations giving individual managers more discretion to offer goods and services that might appeal to the students in their areas. Any of these new strategies individually or together could yield large gains or failures. Each set of combinations of strategic choices would be represented by a peak on a fitness landscape, and the decision for managers is to determine which set of activities will be the highest peak and then work toward optimal operational effectiveness. Likewise, a university’s performance in attracting faculty members across a university may be a rugged landscape, since various interrelated decisions can affect performance: the ability of specific schools within the university to pay professors (which has implications in the university’s fundraising and endowment success, and policies about how individual schools are financed); policies to encourage joint departmental appointments; and even decisions that impact faculty culture, including course loads, university architecture and office size, and participation in campus governance. The particular configurations of these choices can have large
impacts, and therefore the fitness landscape for the goal of faculty recruiting would be a rugged, not smooth, fitness landscape.

Choosing the right configuration of choices—determining which peak of the rugged fitness landscape to choose—is a difficult task for managers. If an organization is working toward efficiency but they are on a short peak, then the improvements will never reach optimal levels; in other words, the “locally optimal” level of performance may not in fact be the best level (Roberts, 2004, p. 57). To get the best performance, leaders must first find the appropriate peak and then adopt the activities and actions necessary to reach optimal performance. To find the best peak in a rugged fitness landscape requires a process of exploration and then change (Levinthal & Warglein, 1999). In these rugged landscapes, an important aspect of the leader’s role is having the “strategic recognition” that a new course is required, the “vision” to see the broad outlines of a new direction, and the “courage” to implement such a process (Roberts, 2004). Even if the final outcome is not known, leaders must push their organizations to search for these higher peaks (i.e., better outcomes) and to adapt to new situations as they arise. It is not arbitrary whether or not a fitness landscape will be smooth or rugged. A smooth fitness landscape occurs when various aspects of a strategy are independent of one another—when there is loose coupling—while a more rugged fitness landscape occurs when there are complementarities and interdependence.

In the context of higher education and engagement, there are a limited number of activities that constitute engagement work: service-learning courses, community partnerships, centers, among others. The effectiveness of these strategies may vary based on the amount of resources allocated, the environment, the individuals involved, and on
countless other measures; yet there is also a complementarity between aspects of the engagement efforts. Thus, the fitness landscape for engagement at colleges and universities is likely a rugged landscape; the various configurations and investments in aspects of the engagement strategy will likely yield very variable degrees of success. Therefore, for institutional leaders, finding the optimal level of engagement activities is not simply a matter of increasing operational efficiency in a collection of areas; instead, institutional leaders should consider whether or not they have found the optimal peak arrangement of activities and structures that provides the best level of performance.

Institutional theorists argue that in order to be successful, organizations cannot simply look at good strategies or the activities that make up the optimal fitness landscape. Instead, organizations that operate in an institutionalized environment gain legitimacy by adopting and reflecting institutionalized norms. Environments become institutionalized when there is ambiguity and uncertainty in the outcomes, when these outcomes are hard to measure, and when the “technology” is uncertain (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Education is one field in which the environment is highly institutionalized (Meyer et al., 2007; Zajac and Kraatz, 1993). For example, at universities the outcomes of education are hard to measure: knowing what a student has learned after four years of a bachelor’s degree program is highly variable and difficult to measure, especially when compared with a simple measure such as profit or sales per hour. Instead of measuring direct outcomes, colleges and universities use symbols and myths, which are recognized across the institutionalized field of higher education, to demonstrate the value of a degree. For example, it is widely accepted that a student that takes a collection of courses in a particular discipline has accomplished some basic
understanding of that discipline and is therefore deemed to have “majored” in that field, irrespective of the content retained or competencies gained. This arrangement has broad acceptance, and signifies a legitimate symbol of what a college major entails. Thus, it is conformity to the symbols, myths, and norms of the institutionalized environment that grant legitimacy.

In fact, gains in performance that may accrue to the organization are often the result of the organization being rewarded for its legitimacy and are not based on increased performance of the adopted practices or structures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). “Quite apart from their possible efficiency, such institutionalized techniques establish an organization as appropriate, rational, and modern. Their use displays responsibility and avoids claims of negligence” (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, p. 344). Likewise, as DiMaggio & Powell (1983) state, it is “important to note that each of the institutional isomorphic processes can be expected to proceed in the absence of evidence that they increase internal organizational efficiency” (p. 153). Thus, we see that an organization is rewarded with legitimacy and success if its behaviors conform to the broadly accepted norms, not by proving that its outcomes are most successful.

This adherence to norms explains why organizations in an institutionalized environment are apt to look alike and face pressures to conformity. Rather than being rewarded for innovation and demonstrating that it can meet its goals in a new, more efficient, or interesting way, organizations and their behavior tend to become more and more alike, known as institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This pressure to conform can stem from coercive isomorphism, when organizations are compelled by regulatory or other forces to adopt a change; mimetic isomorphism, where
organizations mimic other—often more prestigious or successful—organizations; or from normative isomorphism, where the professionalization of an industry leads actions or structures to look similarly (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Institutional isomorphism leads to organizations looking increasingly similar and tends to dampen innovation and change.

Language, structures, and artifacts can be very important in an institutional environment. Organizations learn to use language to signal their understanding of and conformity to institutional norms. “Organizations described in legitimated vocabularies are assumed to be oriented to collectively defined, and often collectively mandated, ends” (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, p. 349). Thus, it is not uncommon in an institutional environment to see organizational language begin to converge around the legitimated vocabularies of the institutional norm. Adopting language and structures with “high ceremonial value” is one very clear way to demonstrate legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, p. 351). Likewise, practices or structures can indicate the adoption of institutionally legitimated forms. For example, adopting management techniques (e.g., Total Quality Management) have in the past demonstrated that an organization was using the latest and most promising tools, thus granting legitimacy in spite of the outcomes. Likewise, many colleges and universities have established centers for civic engagement (or something similar), which are an externally validated action without proof of its impact. Whether or not these centers make the university’s engagement work more or less successful, it can at least make the university’s engagement efforts appear successful or legitimate.
Presidential leadership

In considering the engagement efforts that are led and championed by the university’s president, it is important to reflect on the dynamics of presidential power at universities. While the president’s title, set of expectations, and job description might suggest that he or she is “in charge” of the institution, presidential power at universities is significantly constrained; universities are not governed in an entirely top-down manner. “Statements of such sweeping authority may appear to the uninitiated to offer almost unlimited control over administrative and programmatic initiatives, but the reality of presidential influence is quite different” (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005, p. 342). In their classic book Leadership and Ambiguity, Michael Cohen and James March (1974) note the ambiguous and ephemeral nature of presidential power at colleges and universities. They argue that while the president has “more potential for moving the college than most people” (p. 197), he or she also faces obstacles, which include formal authority, political and personal maneuverings, and inconsistent expectations.

Presidential power is constrained for many reasons, including the governance structure of many colleges and universities. While the ultimate authority of a university comes from its board of trustees, the board formally delegates much of its responsibility to campus constituents, most notably the president and the faculty. There is a dual system of control in most universities: the administrative system that supports the functioning of the organization and the faculty governance system that controls the curriculum and many other areas (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). While the president is seen to be atop both structures, the nature and source of his or her authority is different. In the administrative hierarchy, the president sets goals, holds subordinates accountable, and
ensures smooth organizational operation, while in the parallel system, the president is expected to be first among equals with faculty colleagues, as they collectively make decisions through consensus and deliberation (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). Unlike many businesses, where the workers are subordinate to and take direction from management, in professional organizations like colleges and universities, the administrative structure is in place to support the work of professional workers, the faculty (Birnbaum, 1992; Etzioni, 1964).

Another constraint on presidential power is the generally slow pace of change at universities; radical change in an institution’s mission is unlikely (Kezar and Eckel, 2002). One barrier to such change is that individuals relate to and experience the institution on a personal level (Clark, 1970), and have “basic assumptions” about the institution, which are deeply held values (Schein, 2004). These basic assumptions “tend to be nonconfrontable and nondebatable, and hence are extremely difficult to change” (p. 31). Such basic assumptions, for example the notion that a university has a responsibility to educate undergraduate students or that a particular institution serves a particular region, are likely not going to change significantly. Short of such assumptions, however, the leader has significant latitude to make changes. Presidents routinely come into office and announce new priorities and initiatives that often carve out a new set of goals or purposes. A new president may announce a new set of initiatives that brings the university in one direction or another: for example, Nancy Cantor, the chancellor and president of Syracuse University, has sought to emphasize the public service and community engagement mission of the university, drawing on both the university’s history and her own vision (Cantor, 2007). In addition to new programs, initiatives, or
funding streams, presidential leadership can make an impact in other ways. Birnbaum (1992) argues that more important than new programs is the cultural influence a leader can have on campus through “language, symbolism, and ritual” that influence individuals’ values and ways of thinking (p. 10). As Birnbaum writes, “Leaders do this, not through rational argument or political power, but by changing constituents’ perceptions of figure and ground and focusing their attention on certain elements already existing in the organization rather than others” (p. 25). In the terminology of Bolman and Deal (2008), presidents’ structural power is complemented by political and symbolic influence. Neumann and Bensimon (1990), too, note that while the president’s formal or structural power may be ambiguous, he or she “has a unique opportunity to bring her or his personal understandings and interpretive schemes to bear on how others understand and feel about their realities” (p. 679).

The president also serves as a bridge between the academic community and the outside world. “[T]here has always been the necessity for the American university president to champion the interests and aspirations of the academic community to the broader society and to play a role in ensuring that the academic community is in touch with society’s interests and needs” (Shapiro, 1998, p. 67). As such, an important role of the president is to gather support for the university and its priorities from external groups. For public universities this often means the state legislature and the general public, so as to garner their support. At private institutions, this may mean alumni, yet also governmental organizations, such as the national funding organizations that support scientific research at universities.
Organizational Culture

Culture is an oft-invoked concept across a wide range of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, management, and education. While some might see culture as an entity to be defined or measured or a variable to be manipulated, others see culture as shared meaning where individuals’ reality is continually and individually constructed and reinterpreted (Chaffee & Tierney, 1992; Martin, 2002). The socially constructed understanding of culture is more compelling, and it is used by researchers in higher education (e.g., Tierney, 1988) and beyond (Bolman & Deal, 2004). Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) argues that analysis of culture is “not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (p. 5). He further gives us a vivid metaphor for this individual construction by describing culture as “webs of significance” that each individual spins. A working definition for culture for this study is Schein’s (2004) conception that culture is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions” (Schein, 2004, p. 17) and “taken-for-granted, shared, tacit ways of thinking, perceiving, and reacting” (Schein, 1996, p. 231) that members of a group share. This understanding of culture recognizes that cultural beliefs come to be held by individuals over time, and they often exist in both tangible ways, but also in implicit ways.

The study of cultures can occur at many different levels: defined groups such as the nation, a community, a family, and among subcultures that cut across other groupings, such as drug users in upper-class neighborhoods or users of particular social media sites. About the organization as a site of cultural studies, Ouchi and Wilkins (1985) observe that the “organization [is] a social phenomenon that has its own features which distinguish it from an environment on one hand [and] from the individual desires
and predispositions of its members on the other” (p. 469). Thus, organizational culture sits between the study of a larger environment (e.g., an industry or a whole society) and psychological studies of an individual. Yet even within an organization, there are also many different subcultures (Martin, 2002); for example, within a university, there may be an overall organizational culture, but also specific subcultures for, say, faculty in the biology department and professional staff in the university community engagement office. And a university’s culture can be influenced from outside the organization (e.g., the system or state level) and from internal subcultures (e.g., departments) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tierney, 1988).

Within the organization, there are also different levels from which to approach culture. For researchers studying culture, it is often appropriate to look at a number of different areas to understand it. Schein (2004) articulates three levels of cultural analysis: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts are surface-level manifestations of culture, including the “visible organizational structures and processes”; these are the things that can be observed at an organization, which may include structures, activities, and rituals and ceremonies. Though these things are observable, it may be difficult to determine or correctly interpret the deeper meanings of these things. Another level of analysis is that of “espoused beliefs and values,” which includes those aspects of the organizational beliefs and philosophy that members of the organization articulate. These items, however, must be aligned with the underlying assumptions and behaviors of the organization, otherwise they risk being either “rationalizations or only aspirations for the future” (p. 30). In addition, these values and beliefs can be so vague that they become meaningless. Finally are the basic underlying
assumptions, which are the taken-for-granted beliefs; Schein argues that any other behavior based on any other norms is “inconceivable” (p. 31). Though it is useful to think of these as three distinct levels of analysis that range from the superficial to the deep, Marin (2002) cautions that all layers of analysis can illuminate meaning, and she argues that deep meaning can come from the study and interpretation of artifacts and other tangible manifestations of culture. “A cultural artifact, such as a story or a ritual, is important because of how people interpret its meanings. Those meanings need not be superficial; they may reflect deep assumptions” (Martin, 2002, p. 47). Likewise, Tierney notes that objects, myths, and artifacts may have different levels of meaning: he argues we can “understand the symbolic dimensions of ostensibly instrumental decisions and actions” (p. 6).
Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

This study seeks to understand the ways in which leaders and others at comprehensive universities conceive of their institution’s engagement with the region. It seeks to explore the vision for engagement held by numerous individuals on campus and understand how they interpret the connection between their visions and the strategies employed on campus. As such, qualitative analysis is the most appropriate method for addressing these questions, which deal with perceptions, conceptions, visions, and complex thought processes. Such understandings are best uncovered through a qualitative study that allows the researcher to elicit individual experiences, reflections, viewpoints, and recollections. Further, the analysis of documents and direct observations are rich contextual factors that such qualitative research.

This analysis uses case study methodology to examine three comprehensive universities to understand the ways in which individuals see the university contributing to their cities and regions. Case study methodology is the most appropriate way to study this, as it allows for a deep and rich understanding of an institution and the many ways in which it is engaged. By spending time at three institutions, there is ample opportunity to collect “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 2002, p. 10). Multiple case study methodology allows for in-depth study of issue over a series of cases (Creswell, 2007). Case study design can be particularly helpful for focusing on a process, and it is especially helpful for considering “how” and “why” questions (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). As Mendoza
(2007) points out, case studies allow us to “gather information about a particular setting or person…, [which opens] the way for discoveries, insights, or hypotheses” (p. 77).

This study focuses primarily on three institutions, though the case is not tightly bound on simply the institution. Because this study is about the community and region in which it is a part, each case is centered on a university, but the analysis extends further into the community and region of which the institution is a part. This includes community groups, civic leaders, students, and the families of students, in addition to policymakers at the state and even national levels. For example, in the case of the University of Southern Maine (USM), the region includes not only Portland, Maine, but also some of the surrounding cities and towns. At Northern Kentucky University (NKU), the bounds of the case extend beyond simply the counties in the university’s service area, but also to the metropolitan area around Cincinnati, fewer than ten miles away across the border in Ohio, and to the state capital of Frankfort, Kentucky, where policymakers have an influence. There are different levels of influence and input from these various regions, and the university contributes to them in different ways. At the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB), the region extends to the city of Brownsville, the Rio Grande region, and even across the US/Mexico border into Madamoros, Mexico. Because this study is about the universities’ connections to the cities and regions, these cases are not tightly bound on the institutions, but into these larger areas.

Site selection

This study seeks to examine comprehensive universities that are making intentional and deliberate contributions to their cities and regions. The site selection
process was aimed at uncovering institutions in which there was an indication that there was a deliberate regional engagement effort.

This study very intentionally looks at the sector of institutions known as comprehensive colleges and universities. This sector of institutions includes institutions that are often defined by what they are not: they are not research institutions, community colleges, or liberal arts institutions. They are colleges and universities that offer a broad array of programs and degrees, with more of a focus on undergraduate teaching than graduate programs or research. There is no Carnegie Classification for comprehensive colleges and universities, and, perhaps because of the lack of research on these universities, no common definition of the sector. The Carnegie Classification that was formerly to be known as “Comprehensive Colleges and Universities” is now known as “Master’s Colleges and Universities” (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2001), but for the purposes of this study a wider group of schools was considered. This group includes those in the Master’s Colleges and Universities classification group, but also those baccalaureate colleges that awarded degrees in a wide range of areas (not only liberal arts areas) and doctoral universities that granted fewer than 100 research doctorates. This group includes just over 1,000 institutions, granting half of all bachelor’s and master’s degrees (48.3% and 50.3%) (NCES, 2008). Of these institutions, 368 are public, but this 36% of comprehensives grants 61% of bachelor’s and 43% of master’s degrees at comprehensives. The publics, therefore, are larger than their private counterparts and are more heavily skewed toward baccalaureates than master’s.

Once the initial set of 368 public comprehensive institutions was identified, I sought to determine a group of institutions that were seeking to serve their cities and
region in an intentional way. Known as purposeful sampling, this technique is aimed at selecting “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Unlike quantitative research that seeks to gain a representative sample from which to draw conclusions generalizable to the population, a qualitative study employing purposeful sampling seeks to identify those cases that offer a chance for in-depth understanding about the relevant issue.

To identify those institutions that were seeking to engage with their cities and regions, a set of criteria that each institution should satisfy was established. Ultimately there were six areas or triggers used to narrow down the institutions further. The first trigger was a look at the institution’s website, examining web pages, documents, and other public statements for evidence that the institution was committed to contributing to city and region. This commitment had to extend further than simply a statement of, “The institution is in service to its state” in its mission statement, but had to include a considered commitment to the region in web pages, strategic planning documents, mission statements, and other documents. For example, at USM, the website was replete with language about how the university trains the workforce of the region: “This array of students is on its way to becoming Maine's next generation of artists, businesspeople, lawyers, nurses, public servants, scientists and teachers” (USM, n.d.). At NKU the language was even more expansive, with an articulation that “Northern Kentucky University is vital to the economic and social progress of this region. [We] support our region, particularly the six focal areas of Vision 2015 - economic competitiveness, educational excellence, livable communities, urban renaissance, effective governance and
Those universities whose websites indicated a commitment to the region met the conditions of this trigger.

Second, there had to be an identifiable set of programs that were designed to help the city and region, and faculty members working toward that end. While the research process would uncover the specifics of these programs to help the city and region, before selecting a site there had to be evidence of projects in which the university engaged with the community, including those with faculty engagement.

Third, the region of the university had to be one that was economically depressed, as this would indicate that there was an impetus or need for the university to respond to the needs of the community. While universities even in non-depressed areas would contribute to their cities and regions, this study examines those universities in regions that need this help most. Some of the factors considered were educational attainment rates, poverty rates, and median incomes.

Fourth, there had to be evidence that the curriculum was somehow responsive to regional needs or conditions. At USM and UTB, there were curricular change processes ongoing, and at NKU there seemed to be an effort of alignment of the curriculum to regional needs. For example, USM showed some evidence that their curriculum and student output was being aligned to the educational needs of the region:

A recent Maine Department of Labor report, “Workforce Analysis of Maine’s Health Services Sector,” projects that Maine will need 17,045 registered nurses in 2016. That will require some 3,000 more nurses than were employed in 2008. Educating those nurses is a state imperative, and not surprisingly, it is the primary focus of USM’s nursing program, the largest in Maine.

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2 http://www.nku.edu/about/plan.php
This suggested that the efforts of contributing to the region were not wholly separate from the main academic area of the university.

The final trigger was that the institutions should have meaningful input from and dialogue with the community. For example, at NKU, there was extensive documentation on the website about public forums that the university leadership held to solicit input from the community members. Likewise at UTB, there were many instances in which community dialogue was promoted, including directly with citizens in the community, with local businesses through the ITEC Center, and through educational initiatives that sought local input. This was designed to ensure that the efforts of the universities were not simply one-way relationships, but two-way exchanges and partnerships between the universities and the communities.

A preliminary set of institutions was identified that appeared to meet the criteria just outlined, suggesting that they had a commitment to intentionally contributing to their cities and regions. After further analysis, some institutions were excluded for various reasons: many institutions had indications of engagement with their communities, but were focused heavily on research and moving the institutions towards seeking prestige in external rankings. Other institutions were excluded from the study because there were indications of strong connections to the community, yet they seemed like isolated initiatives or those unconnected to faculty.

There was also a consideration of having some regional diversity in the sample. I decided not to study three regional comprehensives in one state or region of the country. While a study of three comprehensives within one state system might have been an interesting study and offered details about the influence of state systems, I ultimately
decided that focusing on the individual institutions that would yield the most information-rich cases was preferable. In addition, the regional variation of the different sites in this study promised to yield interesting insights, as they sit in regional areas with large trends facing the nation, including the loss of manufacturing jobs in the “Rust Belt” leading to regional decline and the need for training for new workers; the impact of the border and immigration on communities in the Southwest and the need to increase the educational levels in those regions; and the concerns of cities, particularly those in states with large numbers of workers for whom traditional industries were no longer viable options.

After the set of criteria was decided upon and an initial set of institutions was identified, a diverse group of higher education leaders and scholars was asked to comment on the institutions or offer alternatives. These individuals included professors, leaders at the US Department of Education, higher education consultants, and others with extensive experience in higher education. In total more than 50 institutions were given thorough consideration, and three that fit the criteria were selected as participants in this study.

**Data collection and analysis**

Data collection uncovered information from a variety of sources. Interviews with individuals were an especially rich source of information. Interviews are an appropriate method for uncovering information, as they allow for the in-depth exploration of an individual’s views and experiences. “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 1998, p. 3). Interviews are an essential technique for uncovering
the ways in which individuals understand their experiences, and also offer a way to probe and seek clarification that is unavailable in other data-collection methods. Seidman (1998) notes that interviewing is often an important component of a qualitative study, though often best combined with other methods. Likewise, Tierney and Dilley (2002) argue that relying on only one method, such as observation alone, is “akin to watching silent movies” (p. 545).

The interviews in this study were conducted with individuals at each campus and with a limited number of individuals in the community. At each institution, interviews were conducted with administrators, faculty, staff, and when possible with students and community members. The breadth of interviewees aimed to capture the views and inputs of as many individuals at each campus as would be necessary to get a sense of the way that individuals on the campus conceptualized the universities regional engagement and what strategies were employed to advance it. All but a handful of interviews were conducted on campus and in a location of the interviewee’s choice; almost all were conducted in a private office, though three interviews were held in coffee shops at the interviewee’s choice.

All interviews were transcribed as an ongoing process during the data collection phase, with analysis continuing throughout. Although the researcher completed each of the interviews and transcriptions, each interview was approached with an open mind, allowing themes and categories to emerge from the data; Seidman (1998) writes that the “interviewer must come to the transcript prepared to let the interview breathe and speak for itself” (p. 100). This process is inherently subjective and it depends on the judgment and insights of the researcher to identify those areas that are most relevant and important.
(Seidman, 1998). During the first stage, open coding, major themes emerge and categories are refined for further clarity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Next, axial coding uses the newly refined themes and all data is again coded, looking for deeper meanings and patterns to emerge. Often coding will reveal areas of both “convergence,” where patterns and recurring themes and categories begin to emerge, and “divergence,” where differences become apparent, both within and between cases (Patton, 2002).

In addition to interviews, data for this study came from document analysis. Documents allowed the researcher to uncover more meaning than is available by speaking to individuals; for example, the text of speeches, letters to the community, and other formal documents gave insight into thinking about the role of the university in the community. These documents were studied through content analysis, which is a systematic way of analyzing qualitative data sources. Patton (2002) refers to content analysis as a “qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). Reading through the documents and systematically noting patterns, themes and trends allowed for meaning to emerge from these documents. In content analysis, the researcher interprets meanings, and recognizes that “the drawing of inferences [is] the centerpiece of this research technique” (Krippendorff, 2003, p. 25). In some cases, comparing the statements made by individuals to public institutional documents yielded important insights about differing priorities and the motivations of different individuals across campus. Thus, a content analysis of documents was the primary way in which a large trove of documents was considered as part of this study, with patterns emerging and themes becoming apparent.
Campus visits at the universities were also an important part of the data gathering. It allowed for the interviews and collection of documents, but also helped the researcher get a sense of the organizational culture and less tangible or obvious aspects of the organizations. For example, observing the student center, faculty office space, and areas such as the civic engagement center allowed the researcher to gain a sense of the how the commitment to the community was or was not evident by looking around the website. For example, the physical space devoted to the Center for Civic Engagement at UTB was symbolically important, situated in a beautiful building just off campus and in a community yielded insights into the way campus leaders seek to structure engagement. Patton (2002) notes at least five benefits to a site observation. First, it allows for thick and rich descriptions of the institution and people that make up the case. Second, it allows for the context of the institution to be better understood, which strengthens understanding of the other data gathered. Third, it allows for the collection of data and information that those within the organization might take for granted and therefore omit from interviews or documents. Fourth, observation may uncover information that participants intentionally omit, that they are unwilling to talk about, or is not part of the “official” narrative. And finally, observation of what does not happen can be valuable, especially if this confirms or is at odds with what different individuals have spoken about in interviews.

In qualitative research, there is often not a clear divide between the data collection and analysis phases. The data were analyzed throughout the data collection process, as new information and preliminary findings helped to inform and refine the research questions and research process; such a recursive process allows for tentative conclusions
and emerging understandings to influence the study as it unfolds (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Patton (2002) notes that early stages are often “generative and emergent,” with later stages bringing clarity, understanding, and significant patterns (p. 436). All data collected, including documents and write-ups about observations were centrally filed and organized, allowing for a systematic review (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Validity, trustworthiness, and limitations
Case studies are intentionally and definitionally context and site specific. Exploring the richness and individual contexts of each case allows for the analysis of many forces at work in the individual situations, including the subtle and countervailing forces that are a part of the university’s community engagement. As Stake (1978) notes, “the first priority is to do justice to the specific case, to do a good job of ‘particularization’ before looking for patterns across cases” (cited in Patton, 2002, p. 582). However, cross-case comparisons also illuminate issues that are common to many campuses, and the similarities and differences across the sites were instructive. For example, the differences in the practice of regional stewardship at NKU and UTB were instructive, as were the differences between the regional stewardship at those campuses and the narrower conception at USM. Eisenhart (2009) notes that while generalizability is not automatic in qualitative research, it can be inferred carefully.

There are a number of strategies that this study employs to seek to increase the trustworthiness of this qualitative research (Patton, 2002). First, the author’s biases and personal assumptions are acknowledged and made available for readers to judge how they affect the interpretations and conclusions (Harper & Kuh, 2007). “It is essential for
researchers to identify the backgrounds, assumptions, and biases they bring to the research study and recognize how these shape what they see, the decisions they make, and the value they place on findings that emerge during analyses” (Harper & Gasman, 2008, p. 341). I come to the study of universities and their engagement in the community with my own personal experiences and biases. As someone who has chosen to study colleges and universities, I am supportive of the mission of higher education and I believe that colleges and universities have the capacity to contribute greatly to society. Further, I support the notion that the American system of higher education is very diverse and that different colleges and universities will contribute in different ways; as such, there is no single right way for a university to be engaged. In addition, as someone whose college major was communications and who considered a career in public relations, I have a healthy skepticism for the claims and accolades that university leaders and others make about the success of their projects and efforts. Therefore I approached this study as someone sympathetic and supportive of the mission of higher education and efforts of community engagement, yet as someone seeking to verify that all claims about the university’s efforts were fully supported.

A second way of seeking to ensure trustworthiness is built into the research design: multiple sources of data provide triangulation by offering different angles and perspectives for understanding the cases. By interviewing people with different perspectives on the university and its engagement efforts, different perspectives were uncovered and used to challenge and probe subsequent interviewees. Faculty concerns were articulated for presidents to respond to, and the views of members of the community were voiced to faculty and staff.
Third, alternative explanations, themes, and patterns were explored and shared to show that all sides of the issue have been given consideration. In each of these cases, it is evident that not all participants agreed with one another, and there are instances where certain individuals or points of view do not fit the simple or clean narrative. These points of dissention and tension suggest that the findings and analysis considered all pieces of evidence, not simply those that were most convenient to a single narrative.

There are several limitations of this study. First, as it is a multiple case study, it is inherently context-specific and therefore the findings are not transferrable to other universities. While some common themes and specific findings may have generalizability, this must be done cautiously and with great care (Eisenhart, 2009). A second limitation of this study is that understanding the various ways in which universities contribute to their communities is a very complex process that is not easily understood or distilled. Because so many individuals on a campus participate in engagement, and because it is a loosely coupled and disparate activity, even a case study cannot fully explain the depth of such activities on a campus. Third, since many of the data collection methods rely on the analysis of discourse of individuals and institutional documents, there are inherent questions of the motives and agendas of such discourse. While these concerns can be mitigated by talking to individuals of differing viewpoints and collecting data from many different sources, this reliance on the thoughts and interpretations of others is a limitation of this study.

Despite these limitations, this study uncovers important information about how the university and individuals at it engage with the city and region. These methods offer the best way to gather such information, including the richness and full understanding
that case studies afford. Thus, despite the limitations of this study, it is the best way to increase our understanding of this important subject.
Chapter 4: Northern Kentucky University

Introduction and context

Northern Kentucky University was founded in 1968 as a four-year college to replace a community college that was not meeting the educational needs of the Northern Kentucky region. In 2010 it enrolled 15,748 students, including 13,517 undergraduates and 2,231 graduate students (NKU, 2010). The university is composed of six colleges: the College of Arts and Sciences, the Haile/US Bank College of Business, the College of Education and Human Services, the College of Health Professions, the College of Informatics, and the Salmon P. Chase College of Law. The university and its leadership have sought to make community engagement and regional stewardship a priority, and its mission statement, in part, reads: “The university embraces its regional stewardship role as reflected in its significant contribution to the intellectual, social, economic, cultural and civic vitality of the region and the commonwealth.”

NKU’s location and demographics give a helpful context for understanding its student profile and impact on the region. NKU sits on a large campus in the suburban town of Highland Heights, Kentucky, and is located fewer than 10 miles from downtown Cincinnati, which is across the Ohio River in Ohio. Yet while the university exists within a metropolitan area with a population of more than 2 million people, it draws support from the state of Kentucky and serves an eight-county area of Northern Kentucky, much of it rural. Of the eight counties, the three northern counties, which border Ohio, are the most populous and suburban; however, the five southern counties are rural. The population density in the suburban campuses ranges from roughly 500-1,000 people per
square mile, while the rural counties range from 30-95 people per square mile (American Community Survey [ACS], 2010). The educational attainment rates in the area surrounding the university vary significantly: in Cincinnati, the bachelor’s degree attainment rate is 32 percent, while in the three suburban counties in northern Kentucky it is about 26 percent, and in the rural counties it ranges from under 7 percent to 18 percent. In interviews, university leaders noted many of these demographic patterns in deciding university priorities; for example, the low educational attainment rates in the rural communities were a large impetus for the educational outreach activities of the university. The Kentucky counties are also overwhelmingly white, ranging from 92 percent to 98 percent white (ACS, 2010).

NKU’s president in 2011 was Jim Votruba, and he had been president since 1997. Since his appointment he has articulated a vision for NKU broadly engaged in the community, contributing to the region, not just by certain outreach activities, but “across the breadth of the mission.” In fact, part of the reason he was selected as president was because of his commitment to engagement. Prior to NKU, Votruba served for eight years at Michigan State University (MSU) as the Vice Provost for University Outreach and before that served at the State University of New York at Binghamton as the Dean of the School of Education and Human Development and Interim Provost (MSU, 1997). While at MSU he oversaw a $10 million grant from the Kellogg Foundation to increase engagement between the university and the community. The Board of Regents that selected him at NKU wanted to move in a direction of a more engaged university, and so his background was attractive to them.
Shortly after arriving at NKU, Votruba outlined his vision for campus, which included a commitment to community engagement, but also began a listening tour called “Visions, Values, and Voices” or VVV. An outside observer noted that far from a perfunctory series of meetings to “get to know the campus” by many new leaders, this process involved a 15-person team of faculty, staff, and students that met with 35 groups to listen to their concerns, hopes, and priorities for the university (Gibbons, 2000). The team visited constituent groups across the region, with many team members, including Votruba, driving together in a 15-person van to these visits. The aim was to get a sense of what different groups wanted, and they aired concerns that were specific to staff, faculty, and students. Importantly, people across the region articulated their understanding of and hopes for the campus. As the VVV process concluded, Votruba and the committee articulated a series of strategic priorities, and Votruba pushed to get some changes implemented quickly to demonstrate that they had been listening and to show progress. Some long-sought renovations happened quickly, staff members received a raise, and changes were made in the budgeting process to allow for funding of high-priority areas. And importantly, Votruba began investing in and articulating the importance of regional engagement.

**Strategies of engaging with the region**

*The education of students*

One of the main ways that any university serves the public is through the education of its students. However, there at least four ways in which leaders at NKU seek to make additional contributions through the education of students. First, because of
low educational attainment levels in the area surrounding NKU, the university has sought to increase the university’s enrollment. Enrollment at NKU has increased 33 percent from the 1998 level of 11,799 (NKU, 2006). Second, in addition to the number of students who graduate, NKU has sought to match the degrees of the students to the needs of the surrounding community. An example of NKU matching the educational output of students to regional needs is illustrated by the way in which the university decided to form the College of Informatics. About 10 years ago the university initially considered creating a school of engineering to meet perceived needs for engineers. There were extensive talks between the university leadership and the local business community in which it was surfaced that there was not a large unmet need for more engineers, since other local universities were producing some and engineers could be attracted from other areas, since they were seen to be a mobile sector of the workforce. What these business leaders could not attract was information technology and other information workers in the health, business, and education areas. After further surveys, focus groups, and other input from community leaders, NKU decided that it would create the College of Informatics, which would bring together faculty from a number of departments, including computer science, business, health care, and others. Students learn about using information to enhance each of these areas, and university leaders maintain that the graduates from the College of Informatics are more aligned with the needs of the community than a similarly sized cohort of engineers would have been.

A third way that NKU faculty and administrators seek to meet regional needs through the education of students is by collecting input from the business community about the skills that students should have that complement their disciplinary learning.
These skills include critical thinking, teamwork, and communication. At NKU, in addition to the regular planning efforts the university conducts, university leaders specifically engage with community and business leaders about the needs of the students.

NKU provost Gail Wells describes this process:

We have these discussions routinely where we bring in HR managers or CEOs and governmental groups to just talk with them… [We say to them:] It is your university, providing you with the talent that you need in your business. What do you see as the strengths and shortcomings of our graduates? [These meetings involve] listening to them and actually talking about the hopes and dreams they have as a community and then how we play into those… And then we go back and many of those fit in general education and we share those conversations and encourage our departments to deeper conversations with advisory boards.

Leaders at NKU articulated the importance of communicating with local business leaders, since most of their students would be hired locally by these employers. In this way they seek to match the content of what students learn to the needs of the region.

A fourth way that NKU seeks to contribute to the region through the education of students is by contributing to the civic development of their students. This occurs through programming on campus through the Center for Civic Engagement (including programming through the American Democracy Project), through service-learning courses, and in a unique community-based class. In this class, called the Mayerson Project after the foundation that initially supported the program, students learn about philanthropy and the community. More than 100 sections have been offered since the first in 2000. Each class is given a budget between $1,000 and $4,500 that they invest in a local nonprofit organization. Students in the class do research about organizations, their missions, and goals, and then they speak with a handful of organizations, one of which they will fund. The students learn about issues of need in the community and
spend time with different organizations as they select the one they will fund. While the initial classes were in more professional fields (e.g., Social Work, Education), they have been successful in the departments of Biology, Music, and History. The program is intended to provide benefits to the community, but also for student learning. “We have assessed our classes every year and the results consistently indicate that student philanthropy amplifies what’s being taught, while also raising students’ awareness of community needs and how to meet them” (Olberding, Neikirk, & Ng, 2010, p. 4). As one administrator envisions it, the money is used twice: once to educate the students and again to help the community. The Mayerson Project classes are just one way that through the education of students, NKU seeks to increase the civic skills and capacities of its students.

*University-wide P-12 initiative*

University leaders also seek to contribute to the northern Kentucky region by improving the education system from preschool through 12\(^{th}\) grade, what they call on campus the P-12 initiative. While this initiative gets much support from the College of Education, there are many ways in which this is a university-wide effort. Votruba clearly articulated that the P-12 initiative is the “most important” community engagement strategy that the university has implemented. Votruba noted that in the mid 2000s, when there was more money available to support engagement efforts, “we had an approach to public engagement that could be summarized as letting a thousand flowers bloom.” However, after the recession hit, Votruba noted that some areas had to be cut back, and his commitment to retaining funding for the P-12 initiative demonstrated what a high
priority it was. “We haven’t protected some of the other outreach dimensions but we have protected the P-12 piece and that tells everybody [its importance].”

There were at least three influences that led to a major focus on P-12. First, university leaders noted an overwhelming need in the state of Kentucky to improve education, since, as numerous people noted, the state ranks poorly in progress and attainment measures at the secondary and postsecondary levels. Votruba pointed to research that indicates that states with such low attainment will fall further behind unless the educational pipeline can be improved. Second, the university had some strengths in this area: NKU housed both the Center for Mathematics Education that served the entire state of Kentucky and the Center for Integrative Natural Science and Mathematics (CINSAM), which is housed in the College of Arts and Sciences and seeks to help prepare primary and secondary school students for the sciences and math by working with arts and sciences faculty. Votruba said that these assets and strong connections to P-12 leaders by him and people at the College of Education suggested that they could have an impact on the schools. And third, it did not escape notice that supporting P-12 education is a popular notion with local and state politicians. Votruba observed: “It also is the case politically that P-12 education is the concern and interest of every legislator in every state because it directly impacts their local constituency.” Thus, a commitment to P-12 education became a priority because of a need in the state, strengths in the area at the university, and because it seemed to be a politically smart move.

The NKU effort in the local schools has support in the College of Education. The dean of the college, Mark Wasicsko, is insistent on the importance of forging personal relationships in the school districts and he estimates that he spends half of his time in the
community. He notes the closed nature of the loop between the districts and the university: “We are in an equal partnership with the districts. They send us all of their students, we send them back the teachers, and in between we work with each other to improve both functions.” This orientation toward a close relationship between the schools and the university has been built over the years, and willingness of the leadership to work with the school leaders has built up trust. Wasicsko notes that previously the College of Education was just a department, but a group of local superintendents had approached Votruba and observed that there was a college of arts and sciences, business, and health professions, but, even in light of the talk about the importance of education, there was no college of education. Dean Wasicsko concludes that “the reason why there is a College of Education and Human Services is because the region said we need it of our local university.” Further, Wasicsko notes that he spends at least half of his time in the community meeting with superintendents and others; he said that this is not a requirement of an education dean, but that he finds it to be an important use of his time and he knows that he has the full support of the president and provost to spend time engaging in the community.

In addition to the College of Education’s support for P-12 education, the university’s P-12 efforts are not confined to that college. In addition to CINSAM in the College of Arts and Sciences, which draws in faculty from that college, every department at the university has been directed to incorporate a commitment to improving P-12 education in their department. These priorities must be a part of the planning process for each department and are part of the department’s annual review. For example, the Economics Department has started running summer camps for local school children. The
chemistry department, which initially had trouble seeing how their engagement would manifest, sends faculty into the schools to perform experiments with students and help teachers think about active-learning strategies for their students.

Regional planning and development

A third way NKU contributes to its region is through participation in regional planning and development efforts, primarily through an effort called Vision 2015, but also through regional dialogue about key issues. Vision 2015 is an effort that began in the northern Kentucky region in 2005, seeking to improve the life of the community with a focus on six areas: economic competitiveness, educational excellence, urban renaissance, livable communities, regional stewardship, and effective governance. Vision 2015 has a 12-member board, plus a broad coalition of 75 stakeholders serve on the Regional Stewardship council, including the heads of the local schools, the presidents of local companies, and representatives from some major firms with a presence in the area. President Votruba was picked to serve as a co-chair of the Vision 2015 effort. (Vision 2015’s president, Jim Scheyer, noted that an important part of the Vision 2015 effort was to foster talent in a younger generation of leaders, so Votruba was picked as a co-chair as a “senior leader” and someone “well established” and serves alongside a younger attorney as the other co-chair.) Scheyer, the Vision 2015 president, notes that while there are many people at NKU involved in the process, Votruba’s leadership is a key driver of the work:

Jim [Votruba] has really stepped up personally to cause NKU to be a player within the community through his own personal efforts. He has also caused the university to change its focus a little bit to get a little bit outside [the university’s traditional] boundaries… They have certainly made really good strides. I am sure
there is more they can do but they have definitely stepped outside the basic, typical boundaries of the university footprint.

Vision 2015 has also included the work of faculty and staff, who contribute their knowledge and time to the process. For example, a priority identified by the Vision 2015 plan was to create a system of parks and trails in the region. Many different organizations contributed to the plan’s development and implementation, including two different centers at NKU that were engaged as consultants. NKU’s Center for Economic Analysis and Development (CEAD) performed an economic analysis that assessed the economic impact of that project. In addition, the Center for Applied Ecology created a volunteer handbook that provided guidelines for volunteers engaging with the project. Because building a system of trails would take place over a series of cities and towns, the volunteer handbook drew on the faculty and staff at the center having not only the knowledge of ecology, but also an understanding of personnel management and nonprofit capacity that the project creators did not have. These are examples of how the Vision 2015 plan draws on the resources of NKU.

Promoting regional dialogue is another goal of the regional development efforts. The Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement has co-sponsored a series of community dialogues for the community called the Northern Kentucky Forum. They take issues in the community and bring together a panel of experts to discuss the issue and help community members come to informed decisions. For example, one forum focused on the county governance structure in the region; though the three adjoining counties in northern Kentucky would be larger than the state’s second largest city, Lexington, the fragmented nature of the governance has led some to argue that the area does not receive the state recognition and support it deserves. A panel of local leaders
discussed the merits of this issue in a forum. Other recent dialogues have focused on the local impact of the health care reforms happening nationally and on how citizens can make their voices heard at the state policy level. In addition to these more formal occasions for dialogue, faculty give lectures in the community and on campus for the public, sometimes facilitated by the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement, though at other times simply by individual faculty member initiative.

Research in the community

Another area in which the university seeks to impact the community is through engaged research by the university’s faculty, staff, and even students. By their nature, many of the colleges at NKU are directly involved in this type of research: the colleges of Health Professions, Informatics, and Education and Human Development are all in very applied fields. For example, a research project that NKU faculty members are involved in is one that contributes to the local community in collaboration with a number of other local organizations. The US Environmental Protection Agency, the Vision 2015 organization, and an Ohio economic development program have convened a group of community groups, including NKU, to brainstorm ways in which each partner can contribute to a project about water and water management in the region. While the basic research about water molecules and patentable water treatment research may be done out of the University of Cincinnati or the University of Dayton (in Ohio), which are both research universities, NKU has resources to contribute to designing delivery or monitoring systems that will help bring this project to the community. In this way, NKU faculty contribute to the community through their research. There are also numerous
examples of individual faculty members doing engaged research in the communities around NKU.

While there is some research in the humanities and hard sciences, these departments have found engagement to be more challenging. An associate provost acknowledged the difficulty some departments have in fully engaging their research.

It would be incorrect to say that every department is heavily invested in regional stewardship. It would be fair to say that every department is engaged in regional outreach… So yes, we have some people here doing public engagement, we have some people doing traditional scholarship, we have some faculty doing educational outreach.

He argues that even those faculty members that cannot fully integrate their research into the community, there are efforts in “every department” to at least be in the community and involved in other ways. As Carole Beere, the former Associate Provost for Regional Stewardship, noted, there is never going to be universal participation—nor would it be desirable to force everyone to participate. She argued that there are some faculty and staff that already participate and need support and recognition; there are others who will never participate; but there is also a “large middle” that needs encouragement and support. She noted that NKU’s physics department initially did not see how they could be engaged in the community—and neither did she. However, she met with them, brainstormed ideas, and they determined ways in which the department could be involved, including through P-12 outreach, service-learning, and Mayerson philanthropy classes.

An example of students contributing to the region through research is a new program at NKU called Center for Applied Informatics (CAI). It functions as a consulting company, where students are hired and professionally managed, with
dedicated office and work space, and students are paid for their work. The center takes on projects in the community that students complete for their external clients. One recent project that the center undertook was a call from a fire department that wanted to develop a smartphone application that would allow individuals to track fire department activities. For example, if there were an emergency, it could alert people in the area about ways they could help, including performing CPR or other life-saving functions. The CAI charged the fire department a fee, though it was less than what they would have paid a private consulting group. And while the students from NKU did not develop any new theoretical models of programming or discover anything patentable, they did apply prior research to the needs of a small organization, leading that organization to have better outcomes.

**Structures, policies, and supports of engagement**

Perhaps the most obvious example of a structure at NKU is the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement and the fact that the center reports to an Associate Provost for Regional Stewardship. The named and endowed center was founded in 2002, and $750,000 was donated the following year to support its work. Its mission is focused around getting faculty involved in public engagement efforts, whether through service learning courses, the Mayerson Project philanthropy classes, by delivering public lectures or other community work, and also by fostering civic dialogue both on campus and in the community. As the director of the center, Mark Neikirk, notes, “In terms of institutionalizing public engagement, things like… having an office of civic engagement that answers to an Associate Provost who has ‘Regional Stewardship’ in his title
matters.” Neikirk sees the role of the office as “connecting campus and community” and connecting individuals on campus to the engagement effort.

Another major support to the campus-wide engagement effort is the rank, tenure, and promotion (RPT) policy. When engagement became a more prominent part of the expectations of faculty, individual faculty members made it clear to the academic leadership that such work needed to be recognized and incentivized formally: “RPT policies must support public engagement in order for them and their colleagues—especially junior faculty—to invest significant time and energy in the work” (Beere, Votruba, & Wells, 2011). The faculty senate decided that it would move forward on a process to amend the RPT guidelines, but when the process stalled, the Provost’s Office offered to draft up a version of the policy change, which could be reworked by the faculty senate. After a full review by the faculty, the new policy was put in place. It allows that faculty can be evaluated on their engaged teaching, engaged service, and engaged scholarship, and the guidelines give a very specific definition for each. For example, the “scholarship of engagement” is defined as “community-based research, technical assistance, demonstration projects, impact assessment, and policy analysis; scholarly work relating to the study or promotion of public engagement” (NKU Faculty Handbook). By having clearly defined and articulated policies, there is a system in place that rewards the incentivized behavior, ensures that the guidelines are fair and equitable, and clarifies how to document and evaluate it (Beere, Votruba, & Wells, 2011).

In addition to incentives for faculty, encouraging faculty commitment to engagement happens at the hiring stage. Prospective faculty members are told of the university’s commitment to regional engagement, and at times candidates have
mentioned their desire to work in a place where such work is encouraged. Likewise, departments have been strategic in their hiring process. For example, at NKU’s English department, the faculty were interested in hiring a professor in composition and rhetoric. They decided to hire someone whose area of research was in social activism and public engagement, partially because they expected to receive support because it related to the university’s public engagement work. An English professor notes:

[T]hat was part of the reason why we hired him. We were looking for someone in composition and rhetoric and specifically because it was an area we were interested in the department… and also it [engagement] was an area that the university was moving towards. So as a department we certainly see that as a politic way to go. I don’t mean to make this sound cynical. It is a good thing, but it is also something that the university is interested in. Maybe another way of putting that, as with any large organization there are initiatives that you as an individual unit or as an individual employee or faculty member may feel more or less connected to. So here is one we could find a connection to. This seemed like something that maybe we could tie into.

This faculty member saw the hiring process as a point at which his department could fulfill its need for a new composition and rhetoric professor, while also aligning itself with the university’s engagement priorities.

Another support has been the presence of funding streams to support engagement, including the Kentucky Engagement Fund (KEF). The KEF is a public policy initiative that Votruba worked with the Kentucky Legislature to establish. It consists of three streams of funding to encourage the state’s regional universities to focus on engagement. The first stream is infrastructure funds, which support “the development and maintenance of organizational structures, personnel, information systems, and community relationships directed toward the identification of regional needs, opportunities, and stewardship priorities” (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, n.d.). The
second established was regional grant funds, which can support the hiring of new faculty. And the third stream was designed to support initiatives to enhance regional stewardship, though this funding stream was discontinued because of budget cuts.

Another way that the university supports engagement can be found in the openness of the university to the community. An obvious example of this is found through the openness of NKU’s facilities such as the soccer fields and other open spaces. A subtler example is a new facility being built in the College of Informatics, which will have a CAVE, a computer assisted virtual environment. A CAVE is a room in which researchers can visualize their research by immersing themselves in it: data, prototypes, or specimens can be examined in the CAVE environment. Similarly, there will be a digitorium, which will be a large room that can be transformed into many different environments—think a planetarium that morphs into a street scene in a developing country that then becomes a mercantile trading floor. These two resources being built will help assist in student learning and help with research being conducted by students and faculty. However, they will also be available for use by the community. The CAVE being built by NKU is one of a handful of others in the region, though NKU Informatics Dean Perry notes that the others are private. A local company has two CAVEs in its research labs, but the facility “is not open to the public and it is certainly not open to any other business” and that the CAVE at a local private university is also not open to the community. By making the NKU CAVE open to the public, Perry hopes that it will help local businesses and provide interesting experience for students.

The benefits of community involvement are evident by a planned use of the digitorium by the Cincinnati Opera, which received a grant to commission a new opera.
The traditional process when an opera is commissioned is to have a handful of composers write snippets of music for the opera and have a librettist outline some of the words and stage directions, which are then presented to some judges in a small room. By taking advantage of the digitorium scheduled to come online at NKU, the selection of the opera will include the music, but also digital video representations of what is going on—for example, a Pompeian opera can have an exploding volcano, accompanied by a full orchestra—in a large and virtual concert hall. The selection process will be open to the public, providing a public educational component. Further, while the Cincinnati Opera will pay modest costs for use of the space, NKU will provide free services (e.g., programming the volcano explosions) as a service and way to give students and others experience in digital programming in a real-world context. In some ways this is an example of the university’s resources being open to the community; however, it also demonstrates the orientation or stance of openness that many departments at NKU have toward the community.

**Tensions around engagement**

While examples abound at NKU of professors who are engaged in the campus and community, regional stewardship is not something with which everyone is involved or fully supportive. Some professors, particularly in the humanities, expressed concern that their research should not be overlooked or have to be molded to be “applied” or “relevant.” A professor in a humanities department noted that priority in expansion of master’s programs was given to “applied” programs, which risked devaluing his department and others that could not demonstrate a “useful” aspect. Likewise, another
faculty member at NKU who does research in the school of arts and humanities indicated having participated in public lectures and supported members of the department assisting with the president’s vision for P-12 initiatives. However, this faculty member still sees traditional academic research and publishing this research in academic journals as of primary importance.

My own feeling is that for me the research comes first. And then the outreach. Establishing yourself as a scholar and getting published is really, at least in my field, I think that’s the most important thing… But it just seems that doing that kind of outreach prematurely is kind of putting the cart before the horse. Before you’ve actually gone out and done the research and got published and had the peer review and the reviews of your publications.

For this faculty member, the participation in engagement activities and is something that may flow from the academic work, but it is an additional activity that may occur; it is not a fundamental aspect of the work. While at professional schools and some disciplines (e.g., applied economics) there may be a natural alignment of research and regional needs, in other areas, engagement will continue to be a separate and additional activity that may occur sometimes.

Another faculty member raised the concern that the university’s engagement in community is inherently political, and the university is taking a stance by the types of activities that it supports. This faculty member noted that, “[I]t is the Scipps Howard Center for Civic Engagement,” emphasizing the fact that its namesake is the foundation arm of a large corporation. “[I]t’s good that Scripps Howard did that, but it also means that it is institutionalizing certain kind of foundation, corporate giving kind of model of public engagement. So in some ways we are modeling our public engagement on corporate public engagement.” In addition, this faculty member noted that there may be a
point at which the service-learning or volunteering work finds students challenging the corporations, organizations, or governments that support the university and the president. This faculty member worries that the engagement model at NKU risks being too safe.

“How radical transformation are we looking for here? Jim, our president, I have heard him put it that we don’t provide solutions to local problems, we can provide a forum where problems can be discussed and addressed. I think that’s right but I also think it’s a little too neat and I’m sure he realizes it’s a little bit too neat.” As such, the decisions on what kind of engagement to promote and reward is inherently a political choice. While this faculty member is generally supportive of the president, he does raise the concern that portraying the university as a neutral actor is too simplistic a model.
Chapter 5: The University of Texas at Brownsville

“There are no ivory walls here.” –UT Brownsville VP

Introduction and context

The University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) is a young institution; it was founded in 1991. Many of the faculty, staff, and students express strong commitments to the university and the community in which it is located, and UTB is called by many (including in official documents) a “community university” because since its founding it has operated as a single entity with Texas Southernmost College (TSC), a community college. As a result, the university grants not only the traditional baccalaureate, master’s, and select doctoral degrees, but also associate degrees and other non-credit certificates.

The university has sought to make regional engagement a priority; its most recent strategic plan emphasizes the importance of meeting the needs of its border region and contributing through increased educational attainment rates and economic development.

In the future, the economic growth and development of [the university’s] cross-border service region will be highly dependent upon the availability of high-technology versus low-technology jobs. Brownsville and other border cities, which historically have had low-tech industry, must develop a high-tech industry, and this may only be accomplished with the leadership of the university… [The university must also be] actively involved in the training of the next generation of leaders positioned to leverage the intellectual, physical and cultural assets of the community and region. To this end, service-learning and civic engagement activities… are critical to the future of the region. The future of the border economy is predicated upon more capital intensive manufacturing with higher wages for workers who are college and university educated.

For UTB, the needs of the region—including its location on the US-Mexico border and need for jobs—help dictate the priorities and goals of the university.
UTB’s president in 2011 was Juliet Garcia, having served as president of the university since its founding in 1991; previously she was a faculty member and administrator at colleges in southern Texas. As one of her vice presidents notes, “she is an institution in Brownsville”; Garcia is a Brownsville native with deep roots in the community, and she is widely perceived to be strongly committed to the university and the region. As a first generation college graduate, a Mexican American, and a woman, her personal narrative is something that she often shares with students, both at the university and with K-12 students to inspire them to attend college (Aschenbrenner, 2006). She has a commanding presence has wide support on campus and in the community.

Brownsville is a growing part of the state: the population of the city grew 21 percent from 2000 to 2006, while the statewide average growth was just 13 percent (ACS, 2010). Yet the city of Brownsville faces some severe economic challenges, including widespread poverty: the region in which Brownsville sits (Brownsville–Harlingen Metropolitan Statistical Area) has been called the most impoverished region of its size in the nation (Garcia, 2009; Mahon, 2007; Zumbrun, 2009). The poverty rate averages 34 percent, and median family income is one third lower than the statewide average ($30,760, compared with a statewide average of $48,286) (ACS, 2010). The Brownsville region has the second highest unemployment rate in the state (at a non-seasonally adjusted rate of 11.8%) (Texas Workforce Commission, 2011). Further, educational attainment rates are very low: just 14.9% of those 25 or older have a bachelor’s degree or higher; 38% of adults have less than a high school diploma; and another 24% have only a high school diploma (ACS, 2010). To meet this demand, UTB
enrolls 15,230 students, 77% of which are undergraduates (18% are dual credit and 5% are graduate-only students) (UTB Fast Facts, 2011). Since 2004, enrollment has increased by 32% (UTB, 2008).

The city of Brownsville has a Hispanic population of more than 92 percent, of which 88 percent is of Mexican origin (ACS, 2010). Brownsville is the southernmost city in the state of Texas, and it is directly across the border from Matamoros, Mexico, though the border is porous and individuals travel across it daily to work and attend school. The university itself is the sits on the border: a Homeland Security fence, in fact, is located on the southern part of the campus. The university is just blocks from one of the large border-crossing areas, and so Brownsville’s downtown is a major crossing area for people coming in and out of Mexico. Though there has been some violence on the Mexican side of the border, in less volatile times, faculty, staff, and students walk 10 minutes into Mexico for lunch. In 2011, the two cities renewed efforts at joint development in recognition of the “overlapping concerns” on both sides of the border (United Brownsville, 2011).

A sense of commitment to the region

On campus, there are many ways in which an observer notices a strong feeling of commitment to the Brownsville region from faculty, staff, and students at the university. In both casual conversations and interviews, individuals across campus speak about the university, the Brownsville region, and the US-Mexico border region in very personal ways. A faculty member and former administrator articulated it in this way, though her remarks were similar to those of others:
[I see my myself as having an] obligation to care for and do something at this institution for—and I’ve never said the community—I’ve always said my community. And if you could attach some symbolism that it makes it a little bit different when it is my community as opposed to the community. There is a different sense of thinking. And so for me the stewardship is grounded in purpose and meaning.

Throughout the campus, similar sentiments were heard frequently. President Garcia has also noticed this commitment and connection to the local community: “The use of the plural pronoun is real.” She notes that people express a strong attachment to both the university and the region.

Whereas at some universities, “the community” might mean the area around the campus or a defined regional area, individuals at UTB conceive of “the region” in a broader and more complex way: it is international and part of a blended culture. Geographically it certainly encompasses the area around campus, but that space includes a fluid and dynamic international border. UTB’s vice president for external affairs, Ben Reyna, observes that the university has a unique relationship because of the international border; it is “very different than enjoying regional relationship,” he notes. For many individuals in the region, Reyna notes that the other side of the Mexican border is not a distinct or separate place:

We [in Brownsville] have a very unique culture. The Mexican, Spanish, Hispanic culture is very unique in the area here. It is not uncommon for almost all of us to have relatives in Mexico. We don’t see them as foreigners, they are just relatives or friends. And we have several hundred students who come from Mexico every day for classes and you can’t tell if they live in Mexico or if they live in the US. There’s no way tell. It has nothing to do with skin color. It is very, very common to lapse between English and Spanish. That is one thing that happens in any border region. It is very common.
Others noted that faculty, staff, and students often travel to and from Mexico during their lunch breaks for food. An advisor to the president likewise points to the intertwined nature of people on both sides of the border:

As far as we are concerned, the reason why Matamoros affects us so is that it is really one region. There is a bridge but it is really one area. If people have to flee from violence they come here or if people don’t have jobs in Matamoros they can’t shop downtown or in the malls or buy homes on the island.

In October the UTB campus was closed and locked down because of drug violence that broke out in Matamoros. Thus, when individuals on campus speak about UTB having a commitment to the Brownsville region, they are thinking about this blended, international border area.

President Garcia argues that this level of interaction and connection between people on both sides of the border is a strength. While some people see deficiencies in the community, she sees opportunity.

And so the advantage is that you [students] are bilingual. You may not be bi-literate, but you’re bilingual. So we’ll take you bilingual and we’ll hone your skills in both languages and help you become a good historian or a teacher or a nurse who can provide those services in both languages. You’re resilient and bicultural and multicultural because of where you live. You convert Fahrenheit to Centigrade everyday—or pesos to dollars without thinking about it when you grow up here. The world is global not because we invented it to be so, but the people who are here are better positioned to live in an environment that is a little bit more complicated. So we see that as a plus. And on a border—this border particularly, but any border—it means that, like in science, you’re in an interface zone where mutation occurs and there are hybrids. And those hybrids are a little bit different than if you grew up in a more monolithic environment. But they are also pliable and strong. So we think all of those things are good. So does the geography of where we are located drive our mission? The answer is absolutely.
Thus, to understand the ways in which individuals conceive of the university’s work in relation to the community at UTB requires understanding the significance that individuals put on the cultural and international nature of the region.

In addition to seeing the region as unique, individuals on campus are keenly aware that most students come from the region and return to work in the region. Numerous individuals on campus noted the fact that 92% of students come from the Rio Grande Valley (Garcia, 2009). President Garcia notes that regional universities like hers are therefore much more intertwined with the community than a university that attracts students nationally or globally. “Just as a child cannot choose their parents, the challenge for a regional university is that it must succeed predominantly with the students who are born or raised in the region” (Garcia, 2009). Knowing that many students have few other choices imbues their work with a sense of obligation to serve these students well. The Vice President for Business Services noted the mobility of students who attend the nation’s most elite institutions, who decide where to attend school based on the quality of the education, without regard to the geographic distance. She notes that many students at UTB do not have such a luxury.

To some extent our students are choosing us because of geography because our students aren’t mobile. We are the only institution in town. And we know that we are the only opportunity for our students… And even though there is a sister institution 60 miles from here, some of our students don’t have a car to commute 60 miles to UT Pan Am. So when you are the only game in town for some of those individuals you know that it’s important for us to do the right thing and to have the right outcome for the students. So the context is different and I think that when you compare us to someplace like our sister school UT Austin, their context is different too. Students come to UT Austin. It’s different. They revolve around much broader community. We revolve around a local community.
For this individual and other faculty and administrators at UTB, there is a sense of obligation to the students who attend the school and a sense that the university exists to fill a need in the community that could not be fulfilled elsewhere. For these administrators, educating Brownsville’s students is not simply a contribution to regional economic development, but many articulated it as a way of giving opportunity and options to students who might not have other choices. Likewise, President Garcia notes that individuals on campus express the importance and sense of mission they have working at UTB. She observes that while many of the faculty and staff are committed to the region because they have always lived there or returned after being away, there are also many people who have chosen to live and work in Brownsville. As a new university and one without an abundance of resources, those individuals who choose to work there often come with a sense of purpose. “They understand the passion that we have for our work, the urgency that we feel to deliver quickly, and the weight of the responsibility that we have to make a difference here.” 

Policy context

The University of Texas at Brownsville has a unique history, and it is currently in the midst of a transformation. The university was founded just over 20 years ago, in 1991. Previously the local community college, Texas Southernmost College, had been the only college in town, though the University of Texas at Pan Am, located 60 miles away, had been offering classes in Brownsville. The University of Texas system opened UT Brownsville in joint operation with TSC, so that it was one institution with one president, accredited together, and performing both the community college functions and
those of a university. It allowed for students to take community college courses and then seamlessly transfer to the university. Being an open-access institution that educated all of the postsecondary students who chose to stay in Brownsville was a mission that many at the university articulated as being important. However, in the spring of 2011, the university began to undergo a transition that will separate UTB from TSC, beginning in 2015. While it is too early to tell what this will mean for the university, the looming separation and the expectations that the University of Texas system will exert on UTB will certainly influence the university in the years to come.

**Strategies for engaging with the community**

*Regional development*

One of the main ways that UTB administrators and faculty articulate the university’s engagement in the region is by stimulating economic and regional development. One of UTB’s vice presidents notes that there is a need in the region for the university’s participation in this area: “[T]here aren’t very many robust institutions in Brownsville. This isn’t a very sophisticated metropolitan area… so when issues come up one of the first places people look to is the university to see how can we help and what role can we play and a lot of our faculty and staff over the years have played that role.”

The primary site of this work is through a division called the International Education and Commerce Center (ITEC), which is led by Irv Downing, the Vice President for Economic Development and Community Services. ITEC is a division of the university that operates in a former mall near the main campus. The building houses offices for the division, faculty offices and classrooms, including those in architecture and industrial technology,
and lab and work space. One of ITEC’s main projects is helping businesses navigate the international issues around the border, such as business development in the region, and visa requirements and work permits. The division seeks both to help locally owned business establish a foothold in the area, but also to encourage other companies that might be interested in doing business in the region navigate the specific issues of a border area. For example, in one case, ITEC helped a Mexican company that wanted to enter the US market, since it would enhance the work prospects in the region, contribute to the international nature of the community, and offer students experience by working with this business as it sought to grow in the US market.

Another way ITEC helps businesses develop and grow is through the university’s business incubation effort. An organization with an idea that wants to be housed at the incubator must develop a business plan, which will be reviewed by an advisory committee of community business leaders, which may include accounting, legal, and strategic experts. If they are approved, they will have access to support as they seek to implement the plan, including, in some cases, some venture capital-like funding. For example, an organization called Consulting Point developed a plan to build electric motors for bicycles, and through working with the business incubator it grew to be successful and was eventually acquired by another company. Consulting Point’s founders went back to the incubator and developed another business line that worked with hydroelectric plants, becoming successful enough to find business in and beyond the region working with hydroelectric plants and facilities. More recently, after a downturn of business, Consulting Point was able to use some of their expertise and equipment to work with another organization housed at the ITEC Center; the Go Green Center, which
works on green technology and affordable housing, designs efficient sidings for
affordable housing that save its residents money. While the Go Green sidings are being
sold in many places, Consulting Point is now manufacturing the sidings for the Texas
market. Irv Downing, UTB’s Vice President for Economic Development and
Community Services, sees the ITEC Center and synergies like this between businesses as
a major way that the university contributes to the region. Further, he notes that they also
try to bring in students to work with the businesses.

   To me the real home run in that is when you get an undergraduate business
student that might be exposed to that kind of [business development] consulting
and that would be a great experience for a student. It really enhances their whole
course work when they are doing things like that. It may point them in a direction
that they could get really passionate about as well. At the same time we are
providing a community service in terms of helping these small businesses get off
the ground.

Thus, the focus of these activities is to promote the regional development through a
holistic approach to business assistance and development, while at the same time offering
student opportunities.

   In addition to direct business development at the ITEC Center, UTB works
toward regional economic development by promoting the Brownsville region. President
Garcia notes close collaboration with other city institutions, such as the city government
or the Chamber of Commerce. “If a new industry is being recruited to the region, there is
always a university representative asked to be a part of that meeting, whether it’s for
training at the workforce level or for professionals, someone out of our school of
education or school of engineering.” Many individuals, including faculty, articulated
support for the strategy of encouraging businesses to locate to the Brownsville region,
which would both improve employment opportunities and encourage students to stay in
the region. Irv Downing put it this way:

A university like ours is an element of regional economic development. It really
has to play that role there. In and of itself a university is an economic
development generator, right? It does wonderful things to an area just by being
there, but in this case you really have to be a player, you have to see how you can
assist, how to be a catalyst, how you can actually use the resources that you have
to push larger community initiatives along. You have to be at the table on
economic development all the time because most of your students are going to
come from the area and many of them will want to stay in the area. I think you
want to broaden their opportunities in terms of their ability to be able to stay in
the area or that they have the opportunity to be able to go to another place and the
economy is nice enough that they may want to come back at some point in their
lives. And that is a real challenge for us here.

Downing’s statement explains the rationale for many of the efforts of the university in the
economic development area. He sees UTB as having a vital role to play in the
community in terms of using its resources to improve the community, and that a side role
is not sufficient for the university. And he sees this as a way of increasing the number of
choices students have in terms of employment for their post-graduation job, but also as a
way to attract people back to the region years later. The chair of the engineering
department also works to ensure that his graduates have employment opportunities, but
he noted a tension in preparing engineers: that while some students from his department
get jobs locally, many leave the region either for graduate school or for higher paying
work.

Will we find employment locally for engineers? And what outreach is required to
do that? There aren’t enough companies here. We would need to develop jobs
for them. Then you get into philosophical question. Does [educating students for
jobs that do not exist locally] constitute a brain drain?
For those at the university, questions about regional development are not abstract or
designed to improve an already thriving industry. Instead, there are questions about the
basic needs for students to have jobs when they finish school and to have a region in
which employment in high-skill industries is available.

Attracting business to the region does not only include white-collar professions
like engineering. Through the ITEC Center, the university also runs workforce-training
initiatives to ensure that people can increase their skills at all levels. The university runs
short-term training programs that upgrade skills; for example, a police-training program
helps individuals enter the high-demand police and border patrol forces, and English
language programs help people on both sides of the border whose English skills are low
so that they can either enter the workforce or the university. In addition to these courses
for individuals, the ITEC Center also works with businesses to design and run training
courses that upgrade their employees’ skills, and in some cases these courses can
leverage funding from the Texas Workforce Commission. For example, there is a large
tourism industry in the nearby South Padre Island and the ITEC Center was able to
conduct a training program for their employees to increase efficiency and improve
business in the region; similar training occurred with a local windshield wiper
manufacturing company. These programs are part of the university’s efforts to improve
the region through economic development activities.

One major way that the university seeks to have an impact in a broad array of
areas is through a regional planning effort in which many at the university are involved,
including leading the effort and providing input at all levels. United Brownsville grew
out of a project called Imagining Brownsville in which some of the region’s largest
institutions (including the City of Brownsville, the Brownsville Independent School District, the Port of Brownsville, and UTB) came together to make plans for the region. The process included gathering the input of people from across the region by interviews, focus groups, and public meetings. Further, faculty and staff from across the university contributed their expertise by giving input, sitting on committees, and leading discussions. President Garcia and Vice President for Economic Development and Community Services Irv Downing were two of the effort’s tri-chairs, and Garcia estimates that more than two-thirds of the expertise for the effort might have been from those affiliated with the university. In many cases, these individuals used their formal academic training and work experience to contribute to the plans, such as professors in the business school at UTB who participated in a business development task force. The plan focused on a wide range of topics, including the areas of economic development, environment, governance, and transportation for the region.

While there are many efforts that UTB is making in economic development, even those who are directly involved in it agree that more could be done. Irv Downing acknowledges that more could be done in the ITEC partnerships; while there has been a lot of progress, these partnerships “haven’t been fully realized yet,” he notes. And the Dean of the College of Education, commenting about the broader efforts at regional development, sees much success, but also room for more. “You need to promote the economy of the area… How can you help local people to develop the economy? We don’t do enough of that.”

*Educational contributions: University and K-12*
Another way that those at the university see it contributing to the region is through efforts to align the output of students to the needs of the region. The increased demand for nursing and health professionals in the region led to the creation of a College of Nursing (from what had previously been a Nursing department) and the College of Biomedical Sciences and Health Professions, which brought together faculty from the previous biology and health departments and will have a new building opening in 2011. Likewise, programs at the graduate level are aligned with workforce needs. For example, the College of Education developed a new master’s program in school psychology to meet a demonstrated need in the region for psychologists with training in applied behavioral analysis and school psychology. Administrators in the college heard from local parents and practitioners that the need for these trained professionals was “overwhelming”; a follow-up survey further determined that there was interest from teachers and baccalaureate students who would seek the training. This master’s degree meets the needs of the Brownsville region, with the program director stressing that the purpose of the closest public university in developing a psychology master’s program would be primarily to train psychologists for private practice; she observed that Brownsville’s program to train practitioners for the public schools was the way it could best serve the region. Another program recently instituted at UTB is a certificate program for public administrators called the “Certified Public Manager Program.” It is part of a nationally recognized curriculum that UTB began in hopes of improving public governance in Brownsville. Vice President for External Affairs Ben Reyna noted the benefits to the public the program seeks:

The idea is how we train and develop the next generation of public servants, people that are in public policy. How we provide the tools that will provide the
basic understanding? So we are playing a role in public policy and the preparation area… training local leadership in the power of networking, the power of multiple minds on an issue.

This program was developed because of a perceived need in the local workforce for a short curriculum designed to promote better public management, and it was implemented after extensive discussions with the city and other local officials.

Through the content of the university education, faculty and staff also seek to improve the region. Service-learning is an increasingly popular part of the UTB curriculum, though that program is still evolving. In the last three years, the number of faculty teaching service-learning courses increased from 55 to 158, and the number of students participating increased from 815 to 4,680. While these are large increases, it also underscores that service-learning is a rather new and it has not necessarily had time to make its way into the culture or expectations of the wider faculty. The Center for Civic Engagement has sought to provide support for the work, though the director of this center has been in the position for less than one year. However, there are some supports that the Center provides, including small grants of up to $500 to provide materials for service-learning courses. Further, there is a pool of work-study students who have participated in service-learning courses in the past that are available to help faculty coordinate their courses and work with students and community members to facilitate the courses. The director notes that this can be a process of “trickle-up service-learning.” She also notes that while many faculty express interest and desire to do service-learning, much of the recent push to develop service-learning has come from the administration, which sees service-learning as a way to benefit the community, and also to improve
retention. Thus, service-learning will be a part of a larger freshmen retention program that the university is implementing.

UTB is also engaged in projects to improve the K-12 schools. One initiative is a project funded by the Gates Foundation that seeks to bring together people and institutions from across the city and region to focus on the region’s educational pipeline. As President Garcia notes, “it requires us to look as a community at the pipeline of students starting out in junior high school and their preparations for college. Their access, their success in college, and all the way up to their job.” This collaborative effort involves faculty and staff from across the university, and Garcia estimates that a majority of those involved in the project are university people. Another initiative to contribute to the region through K-12 comes out of the College of Education. There is a P-16 council seeking to improve education at all levels, which includes the superintendents from the 14 local school districts; representatives from the university, including the president; the Texas Region One Education Service Center, which is a statewide educational organization set up by the Texas legislature; and there is a new effort to bring in local business leaders. In the past years it has focused on issues such as college readiness and developmental education. One focus of the group has been to promote sharing data across groups and using that richer data set to make informed decisions.

Another way that UTB is involved in K-12 education, which has benefits for the university as well, is through outreach to the high schools about college attendance. The university has developed “Go Centers” that seek to help high school students learn about going to college (at UTB and other universities) and to facilitate the application process. There are ten locations with Go Centers, including the in local high schools, one in a
local mall, and one on UTB’s campus. Current students staff these centers at designated hours and can give personal experiences about being in college and guidance about the application process. Students can apply for the FAFSA, sign up for entrance exams, and make appointments with academic advisors. This initiative was designed as a way of encouraging more students from the Brownsville region to consider postsecondary education.

There are also efforts to improve the civic development of students and the broader community. There is a pair of initiatives around voting, which aim to improve civic participation at the university level and across the region. One is called Project 100% and it seeks to encourage all members of the UTB community to vote. It disseminates information about elections and the issues to members of the UTB community, seeking to raise the number of voters. A second is a children’s voting initiative, run by the Center for Civic Engagement; it is designed to educate local school children about voting to encourage political awareness in them and in the hopes that their families will learn about the issues and vote. One administrator notes that the Kids Voting initiative is designed to have an impact on the K-12 students it targets, on the university students that participate, and on the region as a whole by increasing civic awareness.

So through our engagement in the kids voting [project] we are now starting to see where a lot of the young voters are actually taking their responsibility very seriously. And the idea is to increase voter participation but also increase the knowledge of the community the issues.

This administrator makes it clear that in addition to educating students about voting, these initiatives are part of the university’s contribution to the region by increasing civic participation.
Faculty research

In addition to the student outcomes, the faculty at UTB have an impact on the Brownsville region through research, service, and work in the region. While there is some basic research, much of it is applied and makes contributions to the region. One administrator describes the way that research is thought of as helping the region in direct and tangible ways.

So we do a bunch of little pieces [of research] here and there and that is truly a community university. It is not just about researching and trying to find some earth-shattering breakthrough in medicine or any of the other fields. It is for us about opportunity and access to all of the resources, not only for our students but for community.

While some research, as noted above, is related to the economic development work of the university, other research has impacts on the social and cultural life of the region. For example, there is a professor in the College of Education who studies autism in Hispanic communities. She has found that there are reduced rates of autism detection and late diagnoses; this has roots in the community’s high prevalence of individuals who can speak both English and Spanish, yet without formal proficiency in either. She studies how to distinguish autism when speech patterns are already disrupted, among other risk factors. This research has a number of benefits: the children and families in the communities receive diagnoses and counseling, which improve their lives and contribute to the region; and researchers gain new understandings that are applicable to both the Hispanic community specifically and other communities generally. In addition, the College of Education runs a mental health counseling center that is free for the community. There are many examples of individual faculty projects in the community...
and volunteer programs that occur across campus. For example, an engineering faculty member and his class helped a local nonprofit design and build a mechanical part to help disabled children play instruments, having a large impact on the work of the nonprofit and the lives of the students, while also providing the university students with a lesson in mechanical design.

Yet for all of these examples and individual projects, other faculty worry that engagement with the community is not as widespread as it could be. One faculty member expressed concern that many of the new faculty members do not seek to be engaged in the community.

Frankly, [engagement in the community] is fairly limited. I think that despite all the talk of a community university, the new people to come here from other places do not get that involved in the community. We are emulating other similar type institutions to the point that I don’t know if there’s a great deal of distinction… I think that there are some departments where I don’t see any involvement in the community really at all.

This faculty member, who sought to be engaged in the community through teaching and by engaging with local community groups, did not feel as if others were doing the same to a sufficient degree. A faculty member in the Criminal Justice department said that he had sought to do some work in the community earlier on in his career, but he found it to be frustrating, especially when the implementation of his ideas did not move forward as he had hoped. As a result, his current research is not related to the community. He said that while he knows of some other areas of campus that are engaged, he does not see a large push toward engagement across the university. “I haven’t felt any particular pressure to do research specifically local to the community and I don’t know of anyone else in my department who does either.” This illustrates that, as with any campus
engagement effort, there are some faculty members who are participants and feel connected to the work and others that do not.

**Outreach**

A number of administrators noted that the arts center on campus provides an outreach with many benefits to the region. First, it allows students—both university and K-12—a venue to perform, which brings in parents and families to the university’s space. But it also has the potential to introduce cultural experiences to members of the Brownsville community. One administrator notes that the city of Brownsville does not have very many cultural institutions, and so having a performing arts center on campus is a significant benefit for the region. A dean puts it this way: “And we need to have cultural extension, we need to change the culture, the tastes, the aesthetics, introduce good music. We also need to take the contributions of the environment with their folklore. You need to extend the universities into that field. You are part of that [community], and you need to contribute to that.”

**Tensions**

Some of the administrators at UTB made the case that the university can retain its focus on students and the community while also becoming a “more excellent” institution. President Garcia, in a speech before the University of Texas regents, said, “Our mission as a community university states that all are accepted; no one is excluded from the
opportunity to fulfill their aspirations. But once on campus, they must be held to the same rigor as we would expect on a selective admissions campus” (Garcia, 2009). Likewise, the provost, Alan Artibise, argued that he does not see a tension between being “accessible and excellent at the same time… We are trying to create a model here where you can do both.” He argues that excellence is often defined by how many people a university can keep out, rather than enhancing opportunity and outcomes for the students. He thinks that the university should be able to develop to be both academically excellent, while at the same time retaining the focus on educating students from the community and contributing to the region in other ways. The dean of the College of Education, Miguel Escotet, argued that regional universities should not resign from becoming a first-class university. What is happening is that we tend to diminish the concept of regional or the concept of community-based university. And it’s a major mistake because we are putting them as always a second or third class and this is a problem because it is limiting their development.

He argues that serving a regional population should not limit the university’s offerings; for example he noted that in many areas of demand, the university does not offer baccalaureate degrees—and in other areas where there is demand for graduate coursework, only a four-year degree is offered, meaning students must to go to the state’s flagship to get that training. “To me they’re [the UT system leaders] operating under the idea that the regional university is utilitarian and only serves the needs of the people that cannot continue their education beyond two or four years.” Dean Escotet argues that the university should expand opportunity to individuals to get varied degrees, not artificially limit them. He said that low expectations and funding levels from the state risk such dampened opportunity.
One professor who had been at the university for many years argued that the administration’s talk about excellence is aimed at gaining more prestige for the university.

We ain’t going to be recognized, we ain’t going to be world-renowned…. That is the propaganda line that they [administrators] have to put out. I guess [they] have got to say those things, but I don’t have to. I think that we can do to better reflect the relationship between the students and the community would be a good thing even if it doesn’t enhance the prestige of UTB. Because we are not going to get that prestige anyway.

In this faculty member’s view, the university’s push to increase “excellence” and increase the number of degree options available to students is part of a broader push to devalue local or community-based concerns and to emulate more prestigious peers.
Chapter 6: The University of Southern Maine

**Introduction and context**

The main campus of the University of Southern Maine (USM) is in downtown Portland, Maine. USM is one of seven institutions in the University of Maine system, and the only one in southern Maine, a region with approximately 40% of the state’s population (ACS, 2009). The flagship campus is just north of the state’s capital, more than two hours away, and there are five regional campuses offering baccalaureates in rural parts of the state. The university enrolls 9,655 students, including 7,618 undergraduates and 2,037 graduate students. The university is the result of several merged institutions, including a former teacher’s college, a university, and a standalone law school to become the comprehensive university it is today (USM Libraries, n.d.). In addition to its main campus, it has some offices and residence halls on a campus 10 miles away in Gorham, which was formerly the site of Gorham Normal School that was founded in 1878 to meet the need for teachers in the state. There is also the Lewiston-Auburn campus, about 30 miles away, which has helped to extend USM’s resources to an area previously underserved.

Faculty and staff at USM see the university as having a role to play in meeting the needs of the region and state. The aspiration in USM’s strategic plan suggests the importance the university sees in educating the workforce of the future; the section “Serving the Needs and Aspirations of 21st Century Maine” reads, in its entirety:

USM is the future of Maine. It serves the needs and aspirations of the state’s most populous region as well as its chief center for business, technology, government, and culture. As the region’s public comprehensive university, USM educates a substantial proportion of Maine’s future artists, business people,
healthcare professionals, managers, lawyers, public servants, and teachers. The university’s strategic focus on educating the workforce of this region and state is a natural reflection of its status as an engine for innovation, economic development, and public service. The vitality and relevance of its programs and initiatives must be predicated upon supplying the intellectual capital essential for Maine’s future prosperity and the wellbeing of its citizenry. This requires a realistic and foresighted approach to academic offerings. Reflecting the need to better align USM with the needs of the State of Maine, the university must engage in a conscientious, continuing effort to assess the appropriateness and efficacy of its degree programs, adding new programs where necessary and eliminating others when prudent. USM seeks to play a critical role in preparing the region and the state for the challenges of the increasingly globalized marketplace, the State’s growing creative economy, and the necessity of a well-educated populace.

Clearly, USM sees its primary role in the community as serving the state, particularly through educating students.

The southern Maine region has many strengths, but also many challenges. The city of Portland is a vibrant city, with many cultural and economic institutions. It was named America’s “most livable city” in 2009 by Forbes; while this not a scientific study, it noted that the region’s natural beauty, low crime rates, and income growth make it an attractive place to live (Greenberg, 2009). Yet local leaders have argued that the region does not have a sufficient number of college-educated workers to remain competitive (Silvernail, 2006). While the state has high school graduation rates higher than the national average, the college-going rate ranks 40th, well below its geographic neighbors (Massachusetts at 2nd and New Hampshire at 4th) (Silvernail, 2006). Further, many of the graduates of Maine’s colleges and universities leave the state. Over the last decade, there have been efforts to foster the development of artistic and creative industries in the city, as these industries both attract and retain individuals in Portland and the southern Maine region (Barringer et al., 2004; Creative Economy Steering Committee, 2008). While the
average statewide bachelor’s degree attainment rate at 26.1% (for adults 25 and older) is just below the national average, in the southern Maine region it is higher, ranging from 28% to 38% for the three counties in the region (ACS, 2010).

USM’s president in 2011 was Selma Botman; she assumed the presidency in July of 2008, just as financial pressures were beginning to impact the university from both past budget deficits and the growing financial crisis (MacLeod, 2010). On the eve of her appointment, the university fired 91 staff members and prepared for a $6 million cut to the following fiscal year’s budget (USM, 2008). The university was forced to undertake budget cuts, and has since reorganized the administrative structure of the university, moving from six colleges to three, excluding the School of Law, which was unaffected. These changes have led to the creation of three combined colleges: the College of Engineering, Health Professions, Nursing, Science and Technology; the College of Communication, Culture and the Arts; and the College of Management and Human Service, which includes the departments of Public Service, Business, Graduate Education and Social Work. This significant change, in addition to the replacement of a Provost and changes to the curriculum, led to a busy beginning to Botman’s tenure at USM (MacLeod, 2010). Faculty and staff repeatedly mentioned her focus on these financial and administrative tasks as consuming much of Botman’s time.

**USM contributions through producing graduates**

USM contributes to the community in a myriad of ways, but the most important contribution, as articulated by the president and the university’s strategic plan, is preparing students for the jobs available in the region. There is a mantra that Botman
repeats time and again: that USM meets the needs of the community by educating the nurses, teachers, social workers, and artists of the region. In a monthly op-ed that Botman writes for the *Portland Press Herald*, she returns to this refrain often:

Thousands of USM graduates have discovered that their opportunities have broadened because they hold the bachelor’s and graduate degrees needed to succeed in this knowledge-based economy. Our university focuses like a laser beam on providing students the skills and habits of mind needed for life success. As the only public comprehensive university in the most populous region of the state, we take seriously our mission to educate the region’s advanced work force (Botman, August 20, 2010).

All of us share the goal of providing Maine with the 21st-century nursing workforce that its citizens need. This is a compelling example of USM’s commitment to the future of Maine and the well-being of its citizens, as well as a powerful reminder of this public comprehensive university’s mission (Botman, September 24, 2010).

Public comprehensive universities play a critical role in preparing their graduates to face the challenges of an increasingly globalized marketplace (Botman, October 22, 2010).

She and others in the administration argue that preparing students for the workforce and life in the region is the primary mission of the university. They point to educational aspirations in the community and low degree attainments by many students as motivating the drive to increase the number of students enrolled. Botman and other administrators frame this in the context of jobs:

[T]his is the argument we are making to the state: support public higher education because this state has a relatively low number of baccalaureate graduates. We will not attract industry into Maine unless we boost the number of baccalaureate and master’s trained professionals. So we serve those who are here, but we also want to serve those who aren’t here yet. And that is why the graduation [of students] is so important.
As Botman notes, the impetus for increasing the number of graduates is to meet the needs for increased baccalaureate degrees to match current requirements and to provide a pool of educated workers that will help to attract industry to the area.

To meet the needs of the region, USM seeks to match the degrees to the needs of the community. There are new degree programs and other initiatives that have sought to provide those degrees and skills the region needs. Nursing has been a key push for the university, and the program is expanding at the baccalaureate and graduate levels. One dean noted that even though nursing is an expensive discipline in which to train students, the university, which already produces the most nurses in the state, is seeking to grow its program to meet further demand. Another high-demand area is the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math), and in the fall of 2011 USM is launching the Pioneer Program, which will be an honors program devoted to preparing some of the state’s top graduates in the STEM fields. Individuals across campus pointed to this program, and as one administrator described it, it is a way to make contributions to “the state in an area that is needed.” The Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs for Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity described it this way: “So again [the Pioneer Program] is to meet what we see as the needs of our community in Maine, and they are saying that we are not producing enough scientists and engineers. So this is our way to try to bump up our numbers of scientists and engineers who graduate.” Another example of matching the fields of graduates’ majors to regional needs is USM’s attempt to contribute to initiatives in Portland around the creative economy by creating an Arts and Entrepreneurial Studies major. It combines studio art courses with business courses, such as accounting and technology. This new degree grew out of a desire to meet the
needs of students who wanted some marketable skills, and it aligned with a series of creativity programs in Portland and across the state launched by Maine’s governor (Shaughnessy, 2010). Together, these programs suggest the priority that individuals across the university have made of aligning the degree output to the needs of the state.

USM has also sought to ensure that the graduate degrees match the needs in the region. The university grants master’s degrees and doctorates in a small number of professional fields, including education, nursing, and public service. In the fall of 2011 the first students will enroll in a Doctorate in Nurse Practitioner (DNP) program. At the time the program was announced, President Botman explained it in the context of regional needs and cited statistics about the demand for such degrees. Further, she noted how this fit within the university’s contribution to the region: “USM has a central role to play in educating nurses for the 21st century. Given the growth of DNP programs and the ever-increasing complexity of health care, the launch of this program is a natural fit with our mission of shaping the future of this region” (USM Public Affairs, 2010).

In addition to ensuring that the degrees match the needs of the region, USM’s leaders also seek to communicate with local business leaders about the content of what is learned. The dean of the School of Business, Jim Shaffer, was formerly a local business leader. He observed that the biggest need that he sees from the perspective of those in the business community is for the university to contribute through educating students, particularly ensuring that graduates have the requisite skills to be successful at their jobs.

I was a member of the business community of course when I came here. And I wasn’t hearing people saying that the university is really letting us down. I guess the complaint I’ve heard as a business community member is to focus on our most important product, our students. They would say you need to pay more attention to their abilities to read, write, and think critically.
Shaffer argues that local business leaders seek students with the proper skills for employment, and that this is a more desirable contribution than other ways the university can serve the community, such as regional development and planning efforts. Provost John Wright explains the way in which university leaders ensure that they know what skills local business leaders need. Wright notes that a large percentage of USM students stay in the region, and so they communicate in very specific ways with local employers.

So if in fact we have a [local] company, say L.L. Bean, where we send a lot of our students to, and they hire a lot of our graduates. We have a relationship with L.L. Bean’s managers and supervisors so we can get feedback on how our students are performing and we can tell whether or not you can deliver a PowerPoint presentation or not in a reasonably scholarly manner, with good speech. Or whether you can write a report. So we get that feedback. So that’s a report card that we get also.

Wright articulates the necessity to communicate with employers in the region about the skills graduates should have and ask for feedback on how students are performing. These are very fine and detailed exchanges of information about the success of the graduates; this is different from universities with a national draw, which report meeting the needs of national employers (Finkel, 2011).

Another priority at USM has been to increase the number of co-ops and internships that their students participate in. Faculty and staff pointed to these as a way to improve student learning and as a strategy for retaining students, while also contributing to the community. An interesting argument that at least three people articulated was that by having students do co-ops and internships in the community, they would come to identify with the region and be more likely to stay upon graduation. One faculty member articulated it this way: “my contention is that if students have connected with the community in meaningful ways as undergraduates, perceived themselves as
members of a larger community where they have a contribution to make, they might be
more likely to feel a connection and to want to stay here.” Thus, a growth in internships
and co-ops is a strategy that seeks to improve student learning, contribute to the
community, and encourage students to stay in the community upon graduating.

Focus on student success

Because graduating students is important, the Division of Student Success was
created to bring together services that were designed to help students graduate. The
Center for Community Service Learning reports to this division, and when introducing its
work for the first time, the director highlighted service-learning’s benefits to student
success, not engagement with the community. “So [Center for Community Service
Learning] is now part of that constellation of support for student learning and success.
We also have some wonderful research that points to increase retention on the part of
students who are engaged in service learning.” While she went on to articulate the
myriad ways that service-learning contributes to the community and student learning, it is
telling that her first articulation of the Center’s goals aligned it with the president’s
student success vision, not a community engagement one.

President Botman even articulates outreach to K-12 students in the context of
graduation from the university. “I just had a meeting yesterday about our math faculty
sitting with math teachers in a Southern Maine community to align the math curriculum,
and that is very important because I would argue that one of the single most important
reasons why students dropped out of university is because they can’t pass math. People
talk about, oh well it is money and they don’t have interest and they are not disciplined. It
is math. So we try to, we are focused on ways of working with our K-12 neighbors.”
This demonstrates that student success is a primary motivating factor, and initiatives from
service-learning to K-12 outreach get framed and related to this aspect.

Other ways that USM meets regional needs

President Botman’s main focus is on how USM meets the needs of the region
through the education of students; however, there are other ways that the university
contributes to the city and region. One main contribution is by faculty members, who
engage with the Portland region through their teaching, research, and outreach efforts.
There are examples from departments across the university that demonstrate this
engagement with the region. For example, in the newly combined college that includes
the schools of education, business, social work, and public service, there are many
examples of faculty members that are involved throughout the southern Maine region,
which is unsurprising given these professional fields. In the business department, there
are faculty members who do consulting with local businesses and nonprofits. For
example, business professors and the Center for Business and Economic Research have
done research and consulting with local small businesses and organizations: they
evaluated the effectiveness of programs as part of the Maine Technology Institute and
consulted with the Maine Metal Products Association. Professors in the school of public
service likewise do frequent research for state agencies about the economic and civic
climate in the state. Yet there are also numerous examples of faculty engagement in the
community in non-professional departments. One biology professor’s research is on salt
marshes, and it involves taking measurements of nitrogen and phosphorus utilization by
various plants in the salt marsh. This has benefits for individuals and state entities that can use her information, yet it also benefits undergraduates, because she involves her students in the collection and analysis as part of her courses.

In the areas of art and music, USM engages in many ways with the community. In the Art Department, professors report being engaged in the Portland art community through research, teaching, and outreach activities. The Art and Entrepreneurial Studies program brings faculty and students into the community, developing contacts and providing for interaction. One professor notes that she has engaged students and the community in her art, through a relational aesthetics project and in other projects in which the outcomes are jointly determined by the students and the faculty member. Further, faculty in the art department participate in outreach activities, such as serving on the boards of art galleries. In the music department, the opera division has always been engaged with the Portland opera scene. An academic administrator at USM notes that unlike theoretically based opera departments, which may serve as a destination for both faculty and students who move on after a limited time, the department at USM is “in fact intertwined with the local community” and engages through faculty appointments, research, and other creative activities. In this way, USM draws from the Portland art community and seeks to enrich it through its academic and outreach activities.

Service-learning is another way that faculty and administrators see the university contributing to the region, while also leading to improved student outcomes and faculty engagement in the community. The service-learning effort at USM is still relatively small, though the director of the Center for Community Service Learning is constantly seeking ways to grow the program. She has been able to write grants from some service-
learning organizations to support some of the center’s work, including hiring an
Americorps Vista to support the work. She has convened a Civic Engagement
Coordinating Committee that is staffed by people from units across the university, and
has general support of the president and provost, who have spoken at a university-wide
symposium called Civic Matters for the past two years. One faculty member has been
very involved in service-learning at the national level, serving as a Civic Scholar of the
national Campus Compact.

Through the School of Business, there are a few small programs that seek to
encourage regional development. These include providing assistance to a business
incubator, running entrepreneurship courses for current and aspiring local business
owners, and an administrator sits on the board of an economic development organization
called the Bridgton Economic Development and Education Summit in a small community
in the western part of the state. These are relatively small-scale efforts, undertaken by a
small number of people in the School of Business.

There are also efforts to encourage the educational aspirations of the K-12 student
population in Maine. One administrator articulated it this way:

[P]eople [in Maine] do not see the value in a four-year degree. And so that is a
problem with the University of Maine system is trying to solve their marketing
campaigns…. So that is a Maine thing that we’re trying to change the culture…. which is that a four year degree is, “Eh, who needs that? I can make do.” It’s a
community that made its living with fishing and farming and logging and working
in the mills. We are still predominantly first-generation college students and
many of them are coming from families that are like, “What are you doing that
for? It’s a waste.” That is our pipeline issue.

There are efforts in different areas of the university to address these pipeline issues,
including in the School of Education. The school has joint programs working with local
teachers and districts that seek to collaboratively solve issues. Further, the president notes that she has gone to speak with school children across the state, telling them about her personal experience being a first-generation college student.

**Broader engagement not seen as main priority**

While there are many ways in which there are efforts to engage the region at USM, there is a widespread belief, especially among faculty and non-senior administrators, that these efforts that connect with the community beyond preparing graduates are not a main priority. Many individuals report feeling as if their activities happen without as much support or recognition as they might desire. One faculty member observed that engagement happens to a degree but it isn’t exactly deliberate. It comes out of the special interests of certain faculty. If the university wants to really establish an identity as having a very strong elements of this as part of its identity then there should be more deliberate steps taken to provide basically an infrastructure to support this kind of activity.

Another faculty member noted that a lack of a university-wide commitment to engagement. “[It is] not integrated in a thoughtful or a meaningful way… that understanding isn’t in place. It is not in place at USM. It’s not. I think some people get it… but there is not a really deep and structurally coherent sense of it.” For these faculty members, there is a sense that elements of engagement with the community are happening on campus, but that they are not sufficiently coordinated.

This sense that their work is not a priority of the university is particularly evident in the service-learning area. While the director of the Center for Civic Engagement notes that the president and provost each spoke at a recognition event for service-learning on
campus, and others indicated that they are “generally supportive” of service-learning, other faculty members who are involved observed that involvement in service-learning is not valued or incentivized much beyond rhetorical support. One faculty member who has participated in service-learning courses observed that service learning and engagement activities were responsibilities on top of a faculty member’s normal responsibilities.

I really find USM to be a place where, in terms of community service learning, there is an awful lot of goodwill, very few resources, and, as ever, at an under-resourced institution, the likely suspects carry forward all the work. And then one risks burnout if you keep asking the likely suspects to do the work. And until there are incentives to others, they are not going to do it.

For this faculty member, the supports to encourage service-learning were not sufficiently in place. Even the director of the Center for Community Service Learning, who touted the expanding role of service-learning on campus, described the service-learning efforts at USM as “nascent.” She notes that she is still seeking support for service-learning across campus, indicating that she still feels the need to create awareness on campus and encourage support. “I have continued to try to present service-learning and civic engagement not as window-dressing, not as a luxury that maybe we can get to if we’ve solved all of our other problems, but something that can in fact strengthen who we are and what we do and how we do it.” Yet this aspirational tone suggests that there is yet significant work to be done. Thus, at USM, the service-learning effort seems to be something that the university’s leaders and administrators support to a certain extent; however, those involved in it feel constrained by a lack of resources and more widespread acceptance and valuing of it. This lack of support for service-learning courses—including a lack of financial support and the president’s determination not to give course releases for teaching service-learning courses—indicates that the university
does not see service-learning as a predominant way that the university contributes to the community.

One faculty member currently serving as an administrator noted that incentivizing engagement though resources would be one way to get more people involved, but that this does not appear to be a high priority for the senior leadership. “But that’s putting a lot of skin in the game to do that [provide funding for engagement activities], so somebody has got to be—that is moving from a believer to an evangelist and I don’t know if we’re anywhere near that point as an institution.” To this individual, the university’s leaders did not see incentivizing community engagement as a sufficiently high priority to justify allocating additional resources. A different administrator who also used to be a faculty member put more of the onus for developing engagement on the faculty: “I certainly think our current president … cares about being engaged…. But in terms of real actions coming down from the president, there are certain things that she can set the tone, but real involvement of the public and the community it has to come from, honestly, the faculty. I would say that the biggest issue for our faculty isn’t lack of interest or motivation to do it, it is lack of time.” A faculty member involved in service learning agreed that faculty need to be interested, but argued that the administration can make the work possible: “It really gets shaped by the administrators because as I say they can make the space or foreclose the space where faculty can do this kind of work or students can do this kind of work.” Yet the president, especially in tight economic times, does not seem willing to allow faculty time to develop engagement activities. Botman said,

I am not interested in course releases, because I want faculty members and classroom teaching students. If there are resources available for a project, sure,
absolutely you want to compensate people for their work. Many of our faculty truly believe in service learning and experiential learning and do this themselves as part of the courses. It’s just part of what they do. So they are not incentivized beyond really understanding that students learn deeply when they are able to connect the hands-on part of their work with theoretical part of their work, they really get it.

Botman seems to confirm the sentiments of the faculty; that service-learning and engaged research are something that she sees as something that individual faculty members take up as part of their normal work, not something separate that needs to be encouraged or incentivized. Botman also does not see the need for economic development activities to be a part of a university-wide engagement strategy, because, “That is what our graduates do.” She sees the contributions of the graduates to the economic development of the region to be sufficient, without the need to make economic development a major priority of the university.

The director of the Center for Civic Engagement, who observed that there are many separate engagement activities happening on campus, has hope that these individual efforts could, in the future, be spun into a larger vision. “Well the way that larger visions get created, I suspect in general terms, is by people who have parts of the vision coming together to sort of put all the parts on the table together and look at them. And certainly I have taken advantage of every opportunity to put my part in there, in the vision.” This larger vision, however, does not appear to be shared by the president and her senior leadership.
Chapter 7: Visions and strategies of regional contributions

Strategies for engaging

These cases suggest that there are many ways that comprehensive universities seek to engage with their cities and regions. These many strategies for engaging can be grouped into four areas of contribution (as illustrated in Figure 1): the education of students, engaging the intellectual resources of the university with the community, regional development, and outreach and fixed spending. Each of these areas can be developed with meaningful input from the community.

*Figure 1: Strategies for comprehensive universities engaging with their regions*
The first way in which these universities contribute to their cities and regions is through their main educational function: that of conferring degrees, primarily bachelor’s degrees. Leaders at these institutions noted seeking to ensure that the degree output matches regional needs. At NKU and UTB there has been an increase in enrollments, with each increasing by more than 30% in the past 10 years. In these areas with low baccalaureate attainment, increasing the number of degrees and promoting college going among local school children is a priority on each campus. At USM there are efforts to raise awareness about the importance of a bachelor’s degree in areas that have historically been less dependent on degrees, and at all three of the universities there is outreach to K-12 schools seeking to help students enroll in college.

In addition to a focus on increasing college participation, a priority of these universities in the area of the education of students is to match the output of student majors to the areas of need in the community. At USM, the university’s leadership is very focused on meeting the region’s demand for workers in specific fields, specifically nursing and in the STEM fields. NKU’s College of Informatics was created to meet needs articulated by the local business community; similarly the College of Education was elevated from a division to a stand-alone school after the input of local educational leaders. Students now graduate with degrees more closely aligned to the needs of the communities than before the universities made these changes. The alignment of the output of majors to the needs of the local area is an intentional process that other universities, such as private universities and even those publics that serve a larger geographic area, are less concerned with.
At these three universities, aligning the undergraduate student outcomes is of primary importance, since roughly 80 percent of the students are undergraduates. However, at each of these universities, new graduate programs were specifically created in areas that the local community needed. One of the provosts, perhaps slightly unartfully, described the university’s approach to graduate degree expansion.

So don’t tell me you want to do a degree in a PhD in English. Where the hell are the jobs? What we know is that the fastest growing occupational area is the health professions, for example… We are trying to align our programs and our success will not only be do we graduate our students but do they move nicely into jobs.

This helps to explain why at each of these institutions there are new doctoral degrees in education. At USM they created a PsyD because of a demonstrated “shortage” of school psychologists; at NKU a doctorate in Educational Leadership was part of a “regional approach to improving the educational climate and attainment in the region”; and at UTB, the process for screening new degree programs, such as the one recently started in Counseling Psychology, was explained by a professor of Education and the Chair of the Faculty Senate. “If you cannot establish the need for a program, it is not going to be offered. That is the first question that is looked at. Is there a population, is there a need, is there an unfulfilled need that would benefit our community that would be of interest to our students?”

While matching the educational output of students to the needs of the society has benefits, others might argue that there are risks to this approach. Aligning education too closely to the needs of the economy could send more students in vocational directions to get jobs, discouraging students from pursuing and colleges from teaching those skills that have long been the justifications of a liberal arts education: critical thinking, context, and
civic learning, among others. There are some, including the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), who argue that even vocational and “practical” training can impart these skills (Humphreys, 2006), but too much focus on skills for employment risks a narrowing of what is learned. Individuals at the schools in this study argue that their students, in fact, can have both—a liberal arts core in addition to skills tied to the labor markets. President Botman observed: “[W]e have a very strong liberal arts and sciences core tradition. So if you end up with a degree in accounting, you are going to be an educated young man or woman… [Students] don’t say, I want to come to USM to read to Kierkegaard, although they may read Kierkegaard. They come because they want the job and not only a first job, but they want a lifetime of employment.” However, this tension, between preparing students for the specific needs of the region and giving students a broad education, remains an area of concern.

In addition to matching the areas of the degrees to regional needs, the education of students can contribute to cities and regions through the content of the learning. When asked how the content of the curriculum is relevant to the region, in interview after interview, respondents pointed to service-learning and community-based courses. These courses were the way in which individuals saw the curriculum as being responsive to local needs. Individuals noted that these experiences bring students into the community, where they learn about the community and make contributions at the same time. Yet, it was also acknowledged that this is not a radical difference from other institutions; many other private and public institutions have substantial service-learning programs. As such, while service-learning is a way that the curriculum can be somewhat more relevant to local needs, this is not a distinctive contribution for regional universities that are seeking...
to engage their communities. President Votruba, who is a strong advocate for his university’s responsiveness to the region and service-learning, acknowledges that the main contribution of students is aligning output in major field, with the content being less relevant. When asked how NKU’s curriculum looks different than a non-engaged university’s curriculum, he said,

Again a very good question. And I don’t know if I can give you an answer. Because of this focus [on serving regional needs] at NKU, I think that there may be a somewhat greater emphasis on kind of establishing real world context for many, many majors. Real-world experience, internships, co-ops and the rest. But I’m not sure. What I do think is different is a much greater attention to ensuring that the curriculum is aligned with those sectors that are being advanced in a region like ours.

While Votruba is very committed to service-learning, he also acknowledges that its affect on the curriculum and overall output of the university is limited. Instead, he notes that matching the majors of students to regional needs is the most important way that a regional comprehensive university’s curriculum meets the needs of the region. It is telling that even at this university that is recognized for its commitment to regional stewardship, there is not a significant transformation of the curriculum around regional engagement or regional needs. Votruba acknowledges that, aside from more courses with experiential aspects, the regional stewardship effort does not fundamentally alter or touch the curriculum in a major way.

Another way that these universities seek to be responsive to the region through the education of students is by ensuring that their curricula instill those skills that regional employers need. These include “soft skills,” such as teamwork, communication, and critical thinking. While any university’s students may have these skills, leaders at these institutions noted having specific conversations with local employers to check on those
skills that would be helpful in the local marketplace: Provost Wells at NKU noted periodically convening a roundtable of business leaders, while Provost Wright at USM described close and continued contact with local companies for detailed feedback on the skills of graduates.

Focusing on civic development is another way that these universities contribute to the region through educating students. These efforts include on-campus programming, including civic skills programming through the American Democracy Project, and forums for civic dialogue that sometimes include the wider community. Individuals on each of these campuses noted that they see it to be important that students’ education includes these civic outcomes as well as education for job skills. However, there are few metrics to measure these outcomes. Whereas it is relatively straightforward to measure, say, increased baccalaureate output or graduation rates, individuals on these campuses did not have similar metrics to point to the civic outcomes.

A second major way that these universities contribute to their cities and regions is by engaging the intellectual resources of the university with the community, especially faculty knowledge. Faculty members, with the knowledge gained through education and experience in their disciplines, engage that knowledge with regional communities. This does not mean that they have all of the answers, which they bestow on the community; rather, they can use their knowledge and intellectual resources to work with members of the community to address local problems and concerns, which in turn may return benefits to the faculty. Much of this occurs as part of the faculty members’ teaching, research, and service. One primary way that the university’s intellectual resources contribute to the community is through faculty engagement that occurs through research. Individuals on
each of the three campuses invoked Boyer’s (1990, 1996) notion of the scholarship of engagement, in which the traditional notions of research, teaching, and service are broken down into the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching. For example, the research done by faculty members on Hispanic children and their experience with autism at UTB is an example of Boyer’s “scholarship of discovery” and most closely mirrors the traditional academic notion of “research.” However, much of the faculty work at these comprehensive universities would include the scholarship of application, which includes work that brings scholarly expertise to address concerns in the community. For example, the faculty member at USM does research in salt marshes in coastal Maine or the project at NKU in which faculty at the university helped to plan the implementation of a waterway project are examples of applied research that has a positive impact on the community. This is not basic research that is advancing the field in theoretical ways, but the results can be invaluable to local communities and other researchers in similarly applied fields. While researchers at major research universities might not be interested in such work, it provides a service to local communities. Further, by involving students and classes in this work, it enriches student learning with locally relevant engagement.

The projects in which faculty are engaged at these comprehensive universities is of a scale that is smaller than that at some research universities, yet they contribute in many significant ways to their cities and regions. The comprehensive universities in this study have operating budgets of between roughly $150 and $200 million for 2011. In comparison, the University of Michigan’s budget exceeds $4 billion, including more than $1 billion in sponsored research (Michigan, 2010). When considering the scale and
impact of contributions to the region, these order-of-magnitude differences in university size and resources should be kept in mind. Faculty involvement in these smaller-scale projects can have a tangible impact on the local schools, businesses, and nonprofits near the university, in contrast to many large research universities that boast projects that help the community and the world. For example, at UTB a faculty member in engineering helped a local nonprofit design and build a mechanical part to help disabled children play instruments, having a large impact on the work of the nonprofit and the lives of the students. In contrast, MIT engineers consult with Google or Caterpillar on multibillion dollar projects requiring the latest equipment. There is a difference in scale and orientation, with the regional universities more likely to apply their knowledge to problems in the community than major research institutions. Benefits from MIT’s involvement with these companies might be felt worldwide and would not necessarily benefit the local nonprofit in Cambridge, near its campus; the nonprofit near UTB felt a real and tangible contribution by the professor and UTB. Surely MIT has some outreach programs in the community, but their emphasis is more squarely directed to large projects, whereas at regional universities, the focus is more principally focused on community programs. Further, the sheer size of the comprehensive sector suggests that these types could be multiplied at comprehensive institutions across the nation, adding up to significant local contributions by these institutions.

Faculty members and centers at these comprehensive institutions also serve as consultants for local businesses, nonprofits, and governmental groups, often at no charge or a reduced cost. For example, NKU’s Center for Economic Analysis and Development (CEAD) performs both reduced-cost consulting for local businesses, while at the same
time the director serves on a number of different committees and contributes to local projects with the city and schools that has benefits for the community as a whole. Likewise, professors at USM perform consulting projects for many different state agencies, in particular those at the Muskie School of Public Service. Muskie faculty have performed analyses for the state in many different areas, including incentivizing economic growth, health care policy in the state, and rural development. This is yet another way in which the knowledge of faculty members is shared with the community.

A third major way that these universities contribute to their cities and regions is through direct economic development efforts, including some that are quite separate from the core academic work of faculty and staff. These include efforts to contribute to the city and region through such activities as business incubators that exist at USM and UTB or the economic development efforts at UTB’s ITEC Center. These units of the university are designed to assist businesses creation and development in a very direct way, as opposed to providing general research or consulting help, which are more passive. In addition, NKU and UTB offer workforce-training efforts that provide skills for the regional workforce, which are more targeted forms of training for skills that are needed immediately than the baccalaureate and graduate degrees offered in the traditional university setting. NKU’s teacher training certificates are an example of this, as are UTB’s trainings for employers of workers from the South Padre Island area and the windshield wiper manufacturing company. Further, administrators at UTB assist local government and business representatives in recruiting other businesses and industries to the region. These efforts are generally apart from the strictly academic functions of the university, but are ways that the university contributes to the region’s development.
These comprehensive universities also contribute to their cities and regions in ways that blend both economic development and engaging the intellectual resources with the community. Two of the most prominent ways that this happens at these universities are through K-12 initiatives and regional planning. The K-12 (or P-12 in the case of NKU) efforts at these universities are major ways in which comprehensive universities can contribute to the region. Each of the universities in this study was involved in efforts to promote K-12 education, and promoting K-12 education was a prominent priority of the president of each of the schools. The P-12 effort at NKU spans the entire university, with the College of Education contributing, along with all of the other schools and departments, including research by faculty, engaging school children on and off-campus, and working with local districts. To encourage this work, there are incentives and supports at NKU, including the requirement that each department be involved; structural support from the Center for Civic Engagement; and the campus culture of engagement. Another contribution to education came from the two presidents at UTB and USM, both of whom are female and first-generation college graduates who make speeches and appearances in the community often telling their personal stories in hopes of inspiring students. Finally, each school in this study seeks to promote the educational pipeline for primary and secondary students through either comprehensive plan in the case of UTB or by the outreach that each of these universities engages in.

The regional planning efforts at both NKU and UTB are large-scale programs that impact the cities and regions of which they are a part. These efforts go far beyond institutional planning and encompass plans for the region as a whole. Both presidents Votruba and Garcia are heavily involved in leading these plans, as are members of their
senior staffs; larger numbers of faculty and staff are also involved in various task forces and in lending their expertise to individual aspects of the plans. While these leaders and others pointed with pride to the contributions to the region coming from these plans, critics have argued that these efforts are beyond the role the university and its leaders should assume. A board member at USM said that he is philosophically opposed to such regional planning from the public sector and does not see the need for the university to be involved in such efforts. On the other hand, the plans at both NKU and UTB are having many positive impacts on their regions. The head of Vision 2015 in northern Kentucky, Bill Scheyer, talked about the many roles that NKU plays, from the leadership of President Votruba as a co-chair of the efforts; to providing much of the expertise in developing the plans, especially advice and data that is seen to be unbiased; and to implementing many of the ideas that the plans surfaced. In all, Scheyer noted that the leadership of individuals associated with NKU has been a large part of the success of the planning effort. Likewise, Garcia estimated that a majority of the individuals involved in the United Brownsville plan were affiliated with the university. On balance, these efforts have the potential to contribute to their cities and regions, and they draw on some unique leadership and intellectual resources of the universities.

A fourth way that these universities are involved in their community is through outreach efforts and fixed spending. At each of these universities, there are many programs that involve the community, not necessarily in a way that engages with the university’s intellectual resources, but simply as a way of helping the community. There are numerous student volunteer projects, including both ongoing and one-time events. The use of athletic fields and other public spaces at the universities is also a way of
involving the community, though not in an academic way. The new arts center at UTB brings in members of the community by hosting performances from the local schools and community groups. The space is new and very attractive, and a UTB vice president noted hearing from a community member that attending a child’s performance at the arts center was the first time they had been to the university campus. For a region with very low educational attainment levels, university leaders see the arts center as both serving by providing a venue for performances, but also as outreach by educating and informing the community about the university. A similar facility at USM is an auditorium that community members make extensive use of. One of the deans notes that the facility is “only about seven years old. I don’t know how we survived without that because it is programmed so intensely that there is a lot of community activity that takes place in that Abramson Center and the big auditorium and the associated conference rooms. And some of it does not relate to the degree programs the university, but it does relate to the cultural richness of the area.” The center provides a venue for community groups to interact with the university and its resources, feeling like a part of the university.

There are also contributions to the region through the universities’ fixed spending, such as salaries and other expenses that have a positive economic impact in the region. Universities often tout this spending as a contribution to the region, though this spending is a byproduct of the university’s work, not an intentional way that it chooses to impact the region. There are numerous studies or reports of economic impact in the region, seeking to demonstrate the ways in which universities contribute through their roles as large employers or purchasers, and they often note that universities and hospitals—“Eds and Meds”—are some of the largest employers in the nation’s largest cities, contributing
billions of dollars to the regional economies (Appleseed, 2003; ICIC, 1999; Harkavy and Zuckerman, 1999). For example, Brown University boasts that it attracts more than $100 million in research funding and that 98% of it is from out of state, thereby contributing to the state’s economic development. This way of contributing, however, is of limited interest, because it occurs whether or not the university has a commitment to the region; it is simply a byproduct of the university’s location. Unlike regional stewardship, this way of contributing can occur at universities that happen to be in, but not necessarily of a region.

One exception is where universities make intentional purchasing decisions to positively impact the community. While not observed at any of the universities in this study, the University of Pennsylvania has a “buy local” program, in which there are incentives to purchase from businesses in the local area and from women- and minority-owned businesses. In addition, the university assists local small businesses to ensure that they can handle the large contracts that the university needs fulfilled. In an account of the university’s work, former president Judith Rodin writes, “We also helped community entrepreneurs create middleman companies to deal with large vendors, mentoring (often with the volunteer assistance of Wharton [School of Business] faculty and students) these small businesses to form partnerships with major national firms” (Rodin, 2007, p. 133). In 2008, the university purchased $89.6 million worth of goods from community-based vendors, which accounted for 11% of its purchasing. These actions are specifically performed as a way to contribute to the city and community as the university performs its work.

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4 http://www.purchasing.upenn.edu/social/local-community-business.php
Two divergent visions

While Figure 1 delineates some large yet general strategies for engaging with the region, each campus will have a specific set of strategies for fulfilling its vision for its contribution to the region. The presidents in this study have different visions for engagement, which align with two different notions: at NKU and UTB the vision could be characterized as a vision of regional stewardship, while the vision at USM has a narrower way of contributing to the region. This specific vision or conception of the university’s regional role will determine the mix of different strategies for engagement that will be present on a campus. Further, and more importantly, the vision may determine which strategies are incentivized, encouraged, and prioritized. The regional stewardship vision for engagement with the region sees all areas of Figure 1 as being important, and as such they are all encouraged as part of the university’s engagement strategy. At USM, the vision for engagement with the region is narrower, and so only a subset of the strategies in Figure 1 are encouraged and incentivized as part of the university’s engagement strategy.

Regional stewardship and moving toward institutionalization

Each of the universities in this study has a unique way that it seeks to contribute to its city and region. However, both the visions for engagement held by leaders and people across campus at NKU and the UTB translate into a wide-ranging role for the university in its community, seeking to put in place strategies in areas across the university’s mission. The visions articulated by both presidents for engagement align
with the notion of “regional stewardship,” which sees regional development and regional priorities as a major institutional focus. In a campus that seeks to practice regional stewardship, engagement and regional contributions are the focus of the entire university and they are deliberate actions and strategies, not simply the outcomes of the university’s normal functioning. “[R]egional stewardship is not a task or a project. It is an orientation” (ARS et al., 2006, p. 4). This requires a pattern of faculty moving beyond a personal research agenda that gets published only in academic journals to asking what problems the region needs addressed; administrators must facilitate, encourage, and incentivize staff and faculty to consider regional problems as their own; and the leadership must challenge those on campus to consider this vision of being a regional steward as an essential part of their work, rather than something that gets done in one’s spare time or because of a particular commitment to the community.

At NKU and UTB, both presidents have articulated a vision for the university that is aligned with the notion of regional stewardship. Each sees the university as having a broad role in the region; essential to contributing to the region is a broad-based engagement and one in which members of the community help to set the priorities. Votruba and Garcia see all aspects of Figure 1 as important parts of the engagement effort: this includes the importance of educating students for regional needs, but also tying in service-learning and faculty research in the community to the overall engagement effort. Economic development and regional planning are likewise integral parts of this vision for engagement.

While the leaders at NKU and UTB have a vision for the university as a regional steward, it is fair to ask the extent to which this vision is held by others and is becoming
institutionalized. As noted by Hartley, Harkavy, and Benson (2002), institutionalization of an activity or way of thinking requires both “structural and ideological (or cultural) features” to promote widespread acceptance and legitimacy (p. 206). They note that changes made to institutional structures are not enough to lead to a successful institutionalization if there are not also corresponding changes to ideological and cultural aspects of individuals’ experience.

Structural elements (more resources and more policies) are alone insufficient to alter the day-to-day behaviors of individuals, particularly those working in loosely coupled organizations like colleges and universities. Conversely, no band of zealous advocates for any idea will spur broad-based change if they cannot secure adequate resources. Structure and ideology are the twin drivers of institutionalized change.

On both of these campuses, there are changes to structures and policies and growing ideological support for a vision of regional stewardship. The extent to which these changes are widespread will help us to understand the extent of institutionalization.

At Northern Kentucky University, there are many ways that the leaders have sought to encourage an ideological connection to the engagement vision. An important starting point for this was to make clear that engagement in the community was a priority and was valued. Votruba notes—and others on campus mentioned as well—that his talk about engagement is ubiquitous: “There isn’t a public occasion where I don’t talk about, in some way or another, the work that we’re doing and kind of celebrate that work.” Terms such as “regional stewardship” and “public engagement” are now parts of the campus lexicon. In addition, there are actions taken and decisions made that demonstrate that engagement is a priority; for example, Votruba notes that the fact that the funding for the campus-wide P-12 initiative was not cut substantially as a result of tighter budgets
was an important symbol to those on campus of its importance. “We haven’t protected some of the other outreach dimensions but we have protected the P-12 piece and that tells everybody” its importance. Further, Votruba very clearly and publicly listens to the input of the community and incorporates this feedback into university priorities and plans. Examples of the region having real input include the listening tour as part of the Visions, Values, and Voices; the elevation of the College of Education at the request of local principals; and the founding of the College of Informatics in response to local assessments that it would be preferable to an engineering school. These were actions that the leadership implemented because they considered them to be prudent strategies; yet they also demonstrated publicly the commitment to allowing community needs to set the university’s agenda. While not every faculty and staff member is as fully engaged as some might hope, there seem to be few people on campus who are unaware of the university’s effort to become a regional steward and who have not been invited to participate.

Further, while there are some who express concern about some aspects of the university’s engagement (such as the faculty member who worried about the corporate nature of the university’s engagement), there are not challenges to the notion of regional stewardship or the vision for the university being involved in the community. They have become accepted parts of the university’s culture, what Schein (2004) would call “shared basic assumptions” (p. 29). These aspects of the university’s functioning “gradually become transformed into nondiscussible assumptions supported by articulated sets of beliefs, norms, and operational rules of behavior” (p. 29). At NKU, speaking to faculty members and staff yielded significant discussions of the university’s work in the
community, including its success and challenges; however, the universal assumption was that engagement was a good and positive thing that should be encouraged and that discussions and the evolving nature of the work were revolved around how best to make it happen.

In addition to the cultural acceptance of engagement and regional stewardship at NKU, there are policies, procedures, and programming that have been put in place to encourage alignment to the vision of being a regional steward. This came from a recognition that knowing about a campus goal of regional stewardship was not sufficient if there were countervailing forces pulling in other directions. “The alignment process removes barriers, adds support, and ensures that each organizational dimension is designed to support the work” (Beere, Votruba, & Wells, 2011, p. 32). As such, the position of the Associate Provost for Regional Stewardship was created as a way to provide support for engagement work and as an important symbol; faculty were encouraged to participate in the engagement effort through the hiring process, by amending the tenure and promotion guidelines, and by tracking and rewarding those participating in engagement; internal and external funding was put in place to encourage and support faculty in doing community-based research; and engagement was put into the goals and assessments of departments across campus. A commitment to regional stewardship is also evident by some of the major priorities of campus leaders, faculty, and staff. Two of the university’s highest priorities have been the regional planning effort and the P-12 engagement. Votruba’s leadership of the region-wide Vision 2015 effort demonstrated that regional issues were a priority for him and the university. The university’s major focus on P-12 educational issues likewise demonstrated that the
university had a commitment to going beyond its borders to engage in community concerns.

In addition to considering structural and ideological changes, Hartley, Harkavy, and Benson (2002) note that a framework for considering institutionalization is Goodman and Dean’s (1982) that has five stages. First is awareness, when people hear about the activity. Second is when a small group of individuals try to behavior and determine if it is workable in the context. The third stage of institutionalization is when more people try the behavior and it comes to be preferred. Fourth, when the majority of the people or those who control institutional rewards come to prefer the behavior it becomes an institutional norm. Finally, institutionalization can be said to be complete when it becomes a basic assumption of the organization and a reflection of “who we are.”

Between the cultural and ideological changes at NKU, the commitment to regional stewardship and community engagement appears to be roughly at stage four. Without surveying broadly on campus, it is difficult to determine with certainty the extent of the commitment on campus, but it seems likely that a majority of individuals have come or are coming to prefer the behavior. Further, it is becoming an institutional norm on campus, as people discuss how engagement should occur, not whether or not it should. While some individuals on campus, particularly in the leadership and the civic engagement area, might be moving toward thinking about engagement as a reflection of “who we are,” this process may not yet be complete more broadly.

At UTB, individuals at the university articulate a similarly broad and expansive stewardship of place vision. For President Garcia and others on campus, there is a tangible connection to the community that is especially evident in the way in which
people speak about the community. In describing engagement activities, many individuals did not speak about how their research or projects related peripherally to the community; instead they spoke about core issues of important the region, including US-Mexico border relations, the needs of the Hispanic community that can be addressed by faculty research, and the need to attract more industry and businesses in the region through recruiting and by increasing the educational attainment rate. These priorities illustrate that many individuals at the university see the community’s issues as their issues. The vision for engagement as articulated by faculty, staff, and students was broadly conceived, indicating that those involved in engagement activities see a wide role for the university in the community.

There are also structural supports at UTB that are developed in different areas than at NKU. In the academic area of the university, the structures are still emerging: the service-learning effort has developed significantly in the last year or two, but it is still evolving. Since 2010 there has been an effort to incorporate community-based research and service-learning into tenure and promotion policies, though a formal inclusion has only happened in two schools. Yet in the area of regional development there are well developed efforts: the ITEC Center, headed by the Vice President for Economic Development and Community Services, is a large operation, which contributes in direct economic development by incubating and advising business; through workforce training and skills upgrading; and through providing a space to connect students and faculty with local businesses. Further, there are supports to the university’s efforts in the K-12 arena, including staff at the College of Education and a committee comprised of university and community officials working toward the effort.
At UTB, the institutionalization of engagement might fall between the third and fourth stages on Goodman and Dean’s five stages of institutionalization. As at NKU, the leadership and many individuals across campus may be moving toward stages four and five: considering engagement with the community to be a campus norm and a reflection of the university’s core principles. They have a vision that aligns with regional stewardship, and there are many supports to accomplishing that vision. Yet while there is a strong commitment of support for the community across campus, it is not yet universally held that a connection to the community must be a part of faculty work. There are still factions within the university—especially some faculty—for whom the work of engagement is not a norm and who express concern about its viability on campus. Institutionalization will require more people to see that engagement is a possible and preferable way to do their work.

On both of these campuses there is evidence of widespread ideological commitment to regional stewardship and increased structural and programmatic support, suggesting a move toward institutionalization of regional stewardship, albeit to different levels. Yet Hartley, Harkavy, and Benson (2002) note that institutionalization of a commitment to a new idea such as regional stewardship requires more than the presence of ideological and structural supports. “Institutionalization is more than a collection of administrative and curricular initiatives. As Goodman and Dean put it, it requires a normative consensus that the institutional behavior is not only acceptable but, in fact, it is an expression of the organization’s core purpose” (p. 217). Both NKU and UTB are moving in the direction of institutionalization, but are not there yet. However, it seems likely that as faculty and staff on campus continue to demonstrate success in their efforts
and others come to see and experience engagement activities first-hand, this move to institutionalization will continue.

A different vision: Regional contributions through producing graduates

At USM, the vision of the president and the strategies articulated by university leaders suggest that the conception of the university’s main contribution to the region is the preparation of graduates for regional employment needs, not a broad role of regional stewardship. President Botman very clearly articulates that the university’s most important contribution to the region is producing graduates that match the needs of the regional economy. The president and others articulate the importance of listening to local employers about the needs of the region and the skills that USM graduates should have. The president does not see a focus on economic development as a major priority, because, she argues, “That is what our graduates do.” Thus, of primary importance are graduating more students, aligning the output of graduates to the needs of the region through increased enrollments and faculty lines in particular areas, and a focus on students completing their degrees, including through a Division of Student Success. Even the university’s engagement with the K-12 school system and civic engagement efforts are framed as a way to increase student success in college.

While the university does engage in some of the same activities as a campus committed to regional stewardship—service-learning, faculty research in the community, and a small initiative focusing on business development—these activities are not connected to a larger vision of the university contributing to the region, nor are they incentivized or a main focus of the university’s leadership. The vision of the university
contributing to the region held by President Botman and others sees these activities as something done in the normal course of faculty work or because of a personal commitment to the community. While they may be welcomed and even celebrated, they are not seen as a vital part of the university’s public role, nor are they articulated when speaking or writing about the university’s main contribution to the region. As a result of the leadership holding a vision reflecting this narrow notion of the university’s primary contribution, only a small subset of activities fall into this vision. For those on campus who see their work as contributing to the community, yet are not a part of the vision for engagement, there is an awareness that it is not a top priority of the president and the university’s leadership. Some individuals report being confused or disappointed at what they see as general or rhetorical support for engagement, but without the commitment to ensuring its success that would come through more full support and resources.

Botman’s vision for the university reflects a notion of the public good that is quite different from the notion held by those interested in regional stewardship. It is a more targeted conception of the university’s role in the community, and it is one held by many policymakers, foundations, and educational nonprofit groups. This notion of the public good sees the postsecondary sector’s primary aim as training students for careers, employment, and life in society. By the contributions of these students—both in additional revenue and other social benefits that flow from a more educated population—the university contributes to the public good. Thus, this notion of the public good focuses on increasing attainment rates, graduation rates, and alignment with workforce needs as measures of success. Many policymakers at the state and federal level, along with
foundations and public policy organizations, articulate a notion of higher education’s role in these ways. Whereas the regional stewardship conception of the public good encompasses all of the areas of Figure 1, the notion of the public good that focuses on employment sees only “the education of students” subset of the chart as a major focus.

This notion of the public good is similar to that expressed by some major higher education foundations and policymakers. For example, the Lumina Foundation, which is one of the larger foundations focusing on higher education, sees encouraging more students to complete college to be a major aim that will help our economy and nation, including civic outcomes and benefits. Its strategic plan articulates the foundation’s vision in this way:

Lumina’s big goal is based on the reality that our country faces social and economic opportunities that can best be addressed by educating many more people beyond high school. As a nation, this means we must continue to focus on approaches that make higher education more accessible and affordable for all. We also must ensure that all students who come to college graduate with meaningful, high-quality degrees and credentials that enable them to contribute to the workforce, improve society and provide for themselves and their families (Lumina Foundation, 2009)

The foundation seeks to encourage universities to graduate more students to best serve the public good. There is no mention in the Lumina strategic plans of encouraging community engagement, faculty research in the community, or regional development plans.

The current priorities of the Obama administration in higher education similarly prioritize the goal of increasing degree attainment rates and completion rates. While the federal government does value the social benefits that flow from higher education and has many longstanding programs that support engagement (e.g., the Corporation for
National and Community Service), the current educational priorities in higher education encourage educational attainment and completion. For example, the White House’s explanation of its higher education priorities focus on affordability and access (White House, 2011); Education Secretary Arne Duncan’s explanation of his department’s budget request articulates five priorities, of which two are related to higher education, in addition to funding for Pell Grants (Duncan, 2011). The first is a focus on college completion to ensure that more students who begin a postsecondary degree complete it. The second includes a focus on workforce retraining, including adult basic education and workforce training so that individuals “have access to the education and training they need to be successful in the 21st century economy” (Duncan, 2011). While the U.S. Department of Education has many other grant programs, some of which support engagement on campuses, its primary goals focus on getting students into and through college.

Those with this conception of the public good, which has a narrower focus, do not see the university as having less to contribute to the public good than those who articulate the vision of regional stewardship; the proponents of this vision simply see the benefits coming from the output of graduates. They would argue that the focus of the university should be on the students and ensuring their readiness for the workforce and society, rather than on a broad engagement effort, and on the faculty’s work that contributes knowledge to society. This notion of the public good sees the university as serving society through the output of its students, as opposed to actively solving the problems of the university. Proponents might point to Amy Gutmann’s (2008) discussion of the role of the American research university, in which she argues that universities should do some
work in the community, but that becoming a service organization is beyond the university’s role. She writes that the university’s mission includes very broad goals but they are not inclusive of everything that a university can credibly do. They suggest, for example, that while we should contribute some measure of “social welfare” to broader communities, we are no substitute for governmental and nongovernmental entities, for-profit and not-for-profit organizations whose primary purposes—unlike those of a research and teaching university—are maximizing their contributions to elementary and secondary education, health and human services, and/or economic development. The more universities become short-term service stations to society, the harder it will be for us to pursue an internally consistent vision that maximizes what we are best suited for delivering to society: access to the highest levels of multidisciplinary knowledge and understanding that have the greatest long-term potential for informing and improving societies and our world.

Gutmann argues that while universities must be involved in solving the problems of society to “some measure,” being a “service station to society” is beyond the university’s role, and instead it should contribute in those ways that only a university uniquely can. Different individuals and different leaders in higher education will likely draw the line in different places. However, the conception of the university articulated by Botman has the university playing a much narrower role in these areas than the vision for the university as articulated by Garcia and Votruba.

**Evidence of a campus commitment to regional stewardship**

There are many differences between the campuses in this study, but there are particular differences between the two campuses that seek to practice regional stewardship, NKU and UTB, and that which does not, USM. Institutions seeking to engage in regional stewardship seek to reorient all aspects of the university’s work to the regional engagement effort; though in some areas a campus may be more or less
successful, regional stewardship would entail changes to faculty activities and incentive structures, the priorities and actions of the administrators, including the president, and an alignment toward regional stewardship of all activities at the university, rather than episodic engagement efforts.

An institution’s commitment to regional stewardship is observable by looking for at least four indicators: first, there is a rhetorical commitment to regional stewardship and a change in the lexicon at a campus to include the university contributing to the region in broad ways that fit with the notion of stewardship. This includes the president’s rhetoric, which extends beyond simply contributing to the region or engaging generally with the community, but talks about the region’s priorities driving the campus’ activities and the commitment of all aspects of the university’s work in the effort. Further, this language and orientation must extend beyond the president or offices responsible for engagement to faculty and staff across the university. For example, at NKU faculty members were immediately familiar with the terminology of “regional stewardship” and “public engagement” without explanation, suggesting a broad understanding of regional stewardship across campus. This is a piece of evidence indicating that the rhetoric around the regional stewardship agenda at NKU is sufficiently prevalent and widespread.

In addition to rhetorical support, a second indicator of a campus’ commitment to regional stewardship is changes to policies, practices, and structures that support for regional stewardship. At NKU and UTB, there were changes to tenure and promotion policies that supported the effort, and there were newly created centers and programs, such as the Mayerson Project philanthropy class at NKU and the economic development division at UTB that were developed and supported as a result of the universities’
commitment to regional stewardship. These new programs and the fact that they appear to be a part of the university’s academic core, not simply peripheral activities, offer evidence of the campuses’ commitment to regional stewardship.

A third indicator of engagement is the degree to which programs and efforts on campus form an integrated support for engagement. While any campus might have examples of individual programs or practices, the extent to which these programs are integrated is an important measure of a campus’ commitment to regional engagement. For example, one way it was evident at UTB that regional engagement is integrated across the campus is that faculty and staff were familiar with projects and initiatives across the campus that contributed to the region, not simply the ones in their areas. The economic development division, Center for Civic Engagement, and faculty projects in the community were repeatedly mentioned by individuals across the campus. The extent to which these programs and policies are widespread, sustained, and integrated indicated a regional engagement effort, as opposed to individual episodes of public engagement.

A fourth indicator of regional stewardship would be the presence of resources devoted to the work. These resources must include financial resources, but may be also noted by the devotion of time, especially on the part of the president and faculty members. Financial resources may come from the institution itself, outside funders (e.g., nonprofits and foundations), or from states; these funds indicate a commitment to engage in these activities over others, especially in these tight budgetary times.

These four dimensions on which to evaluate institutions—rhetorical support; changes to policies, practices, and structures; the integration of efforts; and the
commitment of resources—indicate areas for which researchers and practitioners can look for evidence of a commitment on the part of a campus to regional engagement.

**Regional stewardship as an integrated vision and strategy**

On the campuses where the president and academic leaders outlined a vision of regional stewardship and a mission for contributing to the region in which there are contributions from a large number of individuals across the campus, there are benefits that may be unrealized without such an expansive mission. First, it can legitimize and offer support to individuals across a campus: at NKU and UTB individuals indicated feeling a sense of support for their work and as if their work was a priority. Many individuals at USM felt as if their work was separate and unsupported. This suggests that the vision of the president and leadership can support individuals in their work. Second, an expansive and interconnected vision that legitimizes the work across campus may encourage interconnections and complementarity between aspects of the work that would be unrealized in isolation. This suggests that researchers and practitioners should think about engagement activities and strategies as part of a larger effort, rather than separately. There may be ways in which considering engagement efforts in isolation misses some important ways that these strategies interact and complement one another.

**A sense of purpose**

Individuals across all three institutions articulated many strategies to engage with their cities and regions. At the two institutions with a vision characterized as regional stewardship, NKU and UTB, individuals across campus report feeling as if their work is
tied to a larger vision of the president and university leadership. This vision of regional stewardship animates and legitimizes the work of individuals across the campus. At both NKU and UTB, there is a widely held understanding on campus of the president’s vision for regional engagement; and the president’s actions demonstrating the engagement and rhetoric give the work legitimacy and seek to invite others to participate in the engagement activities. By casting a wide vision of engagement, they give the work of many individuals that presidential imprimatur of working on an important engagement effort. At these two universities, there is a clarity of the regional stewardship mission, such that even those who did not participate in engagement activities knew about the presidents’ priorities and that this type of engagement was encouraged.

On the other hand, the vision of engagement as articulated by Botman and other leaders is narrower, and only a subset of the individuals on campus feel as if their work is part of the president’s vision for contributing to the region. President Botman’s rhetoric and core strategy for contributing to the region (“preparing the teachers, nurses, and accountants for 21st century Maine”) is clearly related to the region, but individuals on campus do not make the connection that this is her vision for community engagement or contribution to the region. Further, the work of many people at USM—those doing engaged research, service-learning, and economic development activities—do not see their work as part of the president’s vision for engagement; it is not legitimated as a main and guiding priority. As one administrator noted, there are many individual programs for engagement on campus, “but they are not sort of coordinated, and I don’t think that there is a real vision of how those things are all connected in something that might be called stewardship of place or regional stewardship.”
A look at the attitudes of individuals engaged in service-learning demonstrates how the president’s vision can support or isolate a program. Faculty members at NKU noted feeling supported, encouraged, and incentivized to participate in service-learning, and knew that it fit in with the plan for regional engagement of the president and academic leadership. In contrast, faculty engaged in service-learning at USM reported feeling as if it was an added dimension of their work, unrecognized as part of the core work of faculty, and certainly not a core part of the president’s strategy for engaging with the region. This illustrates Hartley’s (2003) contention that a clear purpose can both focus campus work around a goal, but, importantly, it also “has the capacity to ennoble work,” giving a particular activity legitimacy and “a sense of importance” (p. 76). The vision of the presidents at NKU and UTB has given individuals across campus working on these programs a sense of a larger purpose; it has valued and ennobled their work in a way that it has not at USM.

Potential benefits of systems thinking and complementarity

In addition to an expansive vision having an impact on the way individuals across campus conceive of their work, there may be other benefits from having an integrated and broad-based vision. The strategies implemented on a campus can interact with each other and be complementary, and because of these synergies and interconnections, there can be increased rewards to them. While this study did not evaluate the outcomes of such interconnections, this analysis suggests that studying strategies in isolation might miss some of the benefits to engagement work that come from an integrated vision and implementation strategy. This suggests that scholars studying engagement and
institutional leaders should recognize the benefits that can come from an integrated and
campus-wide vision of engagement. This may have benefits when compared with
conceiving of engagement and regional contributions as a series of programs and policies
implemented on campus. Many studies of engagement do just that: they examine a
particular program or count a series of programs. Rather, it may be more effective to
consider them as a system, one that is interdependent and complementary. A system can
have effects that are greater than the sum of the individual components and so university
leaders and scholars seeking to understand engagement would be wise to consider these
interactions.

The concept “emergent system” suggests that studying the interactions between
individual components can give us a more complete understanding of an engagement
strategy than if we simply considered a series of programs or policies. In such systems,
we cannot rely on “reductionism,” which is breaking a system down into a series of
individual moving parts (Barabasi, 2003, p. 6). “Emergent systems exist when different
elements come together and produce something that is greater than the sum of their parts.
Or put differently, the pieces of a system interact, and out of their interaction something
entirely new emerges” (Brooks, 2011, p. 109). This suggests reframing the way we
should conceive of and study engagement at universities. Rather than simply thinking
about engagement as a series of strategies—a service-learning program or university-
community partnerships—we should conceive of them as part of larger systems that
constitute the university’s contribution to the region. Thus, the unit of analysis is
broader, and the conception of engagement is seen as a larger system, not a series of
individual parts.
Thinking about how parts of a system interact can draw on the concept of “complementarity” from the organizational theory literature. It suggests that the total outcome of a system is not just the sum of each of the positive benefits of the constituent parts, but that pieces of the system can interact and yield increased returns. For example, a report that separately evaluated the outcomes of a university’s service-learning program, business incubator, and faculty research efforts would demonstrate that there were positive benefits in the community, yet it would miss or fail to explain many contributions if there were interactions between these parts of the strategy. By evaluating the entire system, we can look for these complementarities. The concept of complementarity suggests that certain actions, when done together, lead to increases in performance that would not come by accretion or if actions were taken individually.

Complementarity gives rise to systems effects, with the whole being more than the sum of the parts (in a precise sense).… [C]omplementarity means precisely that, once we have raised the level of one of the activities, the impact of raising any of the others is now greater than it would have been when the first variable was at a lower level (Roberts, 2005, p. 37).

Rather than thinking about a campus’ regional contributions as a series of individual programs and policies, this concept suggests a larger unit of analysis to consider the ways in which aspects of the strategy can complement and increase the performance of others. For example, in a business, implementing a new commission-based pay system would be of little use unless there were also concurrent training, new data systems to track sales, and incentives for managers to help the sales force. Such a pay system could be implemented without these supports, but it would be less effective; the supporting policies are complementary, and each action makes the other actions more effective. These effects and complements between variables can lead to increased returns when
actions that are likely to be complementary are implemented together, and so studying the larger strategy as a whole may yield a better understanding than studying the individual parts of the effort.

In considering a university’s vision for contributing to the region, there are ways that studying a university as a whole system, rather than as a collection of unrelated parts, has advantages. For example, having a center on campus that focuses on service-learning may have positive outcomes for the university and the community; likewise, a separate effort to change promotion and tenure (P&T) guidelines to value a broader set of engagement activities, including service-learning, might also have positive impacts. Taken individually, it is at least theoretically possible to measure the benefits that each will have; however, if these actions are taken together, they may lead to greater gains in benefits than the sum of the two individual actions. This is because changing the P&T guidelines to value service-learning is more effective when there is a center that offers faculty support or funding to implement service-learning—generally lowering the barriers and helping faculty participate in service-learning. Conversely, having a center on campus might be underutilized without corresponding incentives from the P&T guidelines. Thus, implementing these actions together yields increased returns because of the interaction than if either were implemented individually, and so a robust service-learning center to assist faculty and changing P&T policies are complements. When thinking about a vision for a campus, considering these complements and interactions may lead some leaders to favor a conception of engagement that is broad and integrated across campus, rather than narrow.
The implications of complementarity suggest that the engagement efforts as part of a vision that aligns with regional stewardship may have advantages that are unrealized at a university with a narrower focus of engagement. For example, the engagement efforts at NKU complement each other in many ways, including faculty research in the community. The strategy for contributing to the region through faculty research could be considered with its complementary actions, such as the president’s continual mentions of engaged research as a priority, which legitimizes the work and allows the faculty member to fully commit to it; the incentives to participate in the tenure and promotion process, which encourage the faculty members to do such engaged research because it is recognized in their portfolio and is not a separate activity; and the well-resourced Center for Civic Engagement, which helps faculty develop connections with the community and lowers other barriers to faculty participation. At NKU, the research of faculty members in the community is encouraged by these complementary structures and policies. On the other hand, at USM, the president does not articulate service-learning as a central way the university is engaged, engaged research is not explicitly a part of the promotion and tenure guidelines, and the service-learning center is a relatively small and undeveloped office. At USM, there are fewer complements between strategies to promote engagement. This suggests that a vision of regional stewardship promotes complementarity and interactions between various aspects of the engagement strategy in a way that a narrower focus on preparing students for employment does not.

Complementarity also explains how actions that might be relatively small in and of themselves might have complementary benefits. For example, consider the fact that the digitorium at NKU is open to the public. By itself, this is a relatively minor
development: it involves inviting local businesses and nonprofits to use a university resource. However, when it is considered with its complementary activities, we are able to see the value it creates in other areas. For example, the openness of the digitorium may lead to more awareness by local businesses of NKU and lead to more consulting with local organizations, both by faculty members and the Center for Applied Informatics (the student consulting business). So while there were consulting projects ongoing before the digitorium was built, the fact that it is now available to the public will increase the impact of the consulting projects. Further, the digitorium’s openness to the public may lead to school groups using it, making the university’s P-12 efforts more effective.

Finally the engagement of the opera community envisioned by the dean of the College of Informatics in the digitorium may lead to enhanced partnerships being formed across campus with arts groups. Thus, the decision to open the digitorium to the public should be evaluated by all of the complementary benefits it may lead to, including increased effectiveness consulting that will benefit local organizations, faculty, and students; a more effective P-12 outreach effort; and potential increases in arts partnerships. The notion of complementarity is an analytic tool that highlights the way one activity or strategy (e.g., opening the digitorium) can lead to increases in benefits in other areas.

The concept of complementarity increases understanding of engagement by suggesting that a vision for regional contribution should consider the ways in which aspects of that vision interact with and complement one another. Rather than focusing on individual strategies, engagement strategies can be conceived of as whole systems and evaluated as such, rather than as a series of separate elements. Past analyses of engagement have often simply counted the presence of different activities, without...
considering if and how these activities complemented one another. For example, the Carnegie Foundation’s classification for engaged institutions counts the presence of engagement activities, such as service-learning courses or faculty research in the community, albeit looking for very broad engagement. It does not consider whether or not there are activities on campus that are completely separate or whether or not they complement one another. When institutional leaders are planning their engagement strategies and when scholars are examining them, considering how activities complement one another may lead to further appreciation of the benefits of an integrated and complementary vision. In this study, the broad regional stewardship missions at NKU and UTB appear to encourage more complementarity between aspects of the universities’ engagement work because of its integrated nature, whereas the narrow focus at USM does not provide as much of an opportunity for complementarity between aspects of the engagement effort; future research on outcomes of these engagement efforts should explore this further.

**External forces impacting engagement**

*Regional needs*

Some of the differences in visions and strategies for engagement at these universities are driven by differences in the context and location of these universities. For example, Portland, Maine; Brownsville, Texas; and the northern region of Kentucky are very different places, and the needs of the communities are certainly divergent. Community members in these places conceive of very different roles they want their
regional university to play. For example, at UTB there was widespread concern among individuals about the lack of industry in the Brownsville region and there are few other nonprofit institutions seeking to address this issue. This was cited often as a reason that UTB should be involved in the community. On the other hand, at USM faculty and administrators noted that the Portland region needed more jobs, but there was also the perception that there are other institutions and governmental entities that were working to address this issue. As one USM dean noted about regional development, “We don’t see a void at the state and local level that we have to fill with our expertise.” Because USM sits in the state’s most populous region, it is the site of considerable attention by statewide organizations and governmental entities. While USM has played a supporting role, it may be that the primary role that a regional university plays in Brownsville, Texas, is quite different in Maine. The location of NKU also contributes to its regional role. While the university is in the metropolitan region of Cincinnati, Ohio, the northern Kentucky side of the border has significant needs that are left unaddressed by some of the institutions on the other side of the Ohio border. Therefore, the university fills a void of institutional leadership on the northern Kentucky part of the Cincinnati metropolitan area.

Public policy

The priorities of each of these universities are not set by the president and the academic leadership alone; they are part of state systems that have some measure of control over university priorities and goals. Each of the universities in this study is part of a system that has statutory control over the planning, coordination, and new programs
(Education Commission of the States [ECS], 2011). USM is part of the University of Maine system, which is controlled by the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine system. Kentucky’s Council for Postsecondary Education (CPE) has statutory control over NKU, including its strategic goals, mission development, and new programs. While NKU also has its own Board of Regents to help guide institutional policy, Kentucky’s CPE retains the broader strategic authority. UTB is part of the University of Texas System, though the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board retains statutory responsibility for approving new programs and setting financing decisions. These coordinating bodies, if they chose, could pay attention to regional stewardship and encourage this aspect of the mission. Other policy levers could include funding from legislatures or other statewide bodies to incentivize this type of work. For example, the funding for regional stewardship in Kentucky was approved by the state legislature and has provided some incentives for involvement in regional stewardship activities.

For policymakers who are interested in encouraging a regional stewardship mission, there are different aspects of a policy landscape that must be in place. Jones (2005) notes six aspects of a state policy framework for supporting regional stewardship. It must include first a statement of goals and priorities for the state that encourages regional stewardship, which have a time horizon of “years if not a decade or two” (p. 13); second, some financial or resource allocation policy, ideally including infrastructure funding to support region engagement (e.g., regional databases or faculty and staff support); third, accountability mechanisms to see the progress of this work; fourth, rules, regulations, and procedures that might encourage collaboration (e.g., funding that can only be used as part of a collaboration between multiple stakeholders); fifth, alignment
tools to ensure that policies are not pulling in different directions; and finally, policy leadership from an entity that is tasked with ensuring that engagement stays on the public agenda.

As many policymakers and academics have noted, the knowledge economy means that having an educated citizenry and promoting an economy that innovates are both drivers of regional success (Brint, 2001; ARS et al., 2006; Florida, 2002). Since comprehensive universities are well positioned—perhaps uniquely positioned—to respond to both of these challenges, this may be a role for these institutions. Yet policymakers must delineate this as a role for comprehensive universities. President Votruba argues that comprehensive institutions can play an important and complementary role to research universities.

[Regional universities] are stewards of place in a way that the research universities are the stewards of a set of global research questions that know no boundaries at all. And it seems to me that these are complementary roles—that you have to have the R-1s [major research universities] that are pursuing knowledge that is frontier-less. They are going to cure cancer and they’re going to do this and they are going to do that. But somehow between finding that cure and the local application of that cure to clinics and local communities, that translation is not going to be done by one institution. At least it’s not going to be scaled by one institution. It may be tested, kind of piloted, but then they are going to go back to doing big science. And my belief is that there is an untapped capacity in these regional or comprehensive universities to do that kind of work that public policy could just unleash if it chose.

Votruba notes that there is a need to translate the major research findings to local application that may best be served by regional universities. However, he notes that without incentives from policymakers this work may not reach its full potential. “I think it is somewhat naïve to believe that institutions can align internally without having a catalyst externally. And that would be [the role for] public policy.”
Barbara Holland (2005), a researcher who studies higher education and engagement, notes the way that policymakers can set priorities for different institutions and sectors.

To succeed in serving the public good, be it at the local, national or international level, a higher education system must ensure that each institution has a clear pathway to success in keeping with their specific mission and the scope and scale of their intellectual assets. In this way, wasteful competition and duplication is reduced, and institutions are encouraged to generate diverse and specific portfolios and knowledge partnerships” (Holland, 2005, p. 17)

Holland notes that by outlining the expectations for each institution, it can ensure that institutional contributions are not competing, but in fact are targeted to what each sector can best contribute. Thus, the practitioner, researcher, and policy analyst, Votruba, Holland, and Jones, agree that there is a role that policymakers must play to incentivize and encourage regional stewardship work. This could lead to these regional public comprehensives playing a significant and vital role in encouraging regional stewardship.
Chapter 8: Conclusions and implications

This study has sought to explore the ways in which comprehensive universities contribute to and engage with their cities and regions. It outlined the general ways in which regional comprehensive universities contribute to their regions, and specifically considered the ways in which three universities envision and structure their engagement with their local community and region. Two of these universities engage in a way that can be characterized as regional stewardship, as their engagement with the region is in a broad array of areas and allows the community to set priorities for the university’s contributions. One university in this study focuses more narrowly on contributing to the region through the education of its students. The regional stewardship mission offers some advantages, as it legitimates the work of more individuals on campus and has the potential to offer synergistic and complementary gains.

Comprehensive colleges and universities make up a large sector of the American system of higher education. They are important because they are so widely prevalent in areas across the country, meaning that they have the potential to have positive impacts on communities throughout the nation. Yet because they lack a clarity of mission, there is the risk of mission creep or a draw to increase prestige by following the model of the research university. The regional stewardship mission, explored in this dissertation, offers a different mission that some universities have adopted. This study has uncovered a number of benefits of the regional stewardship mission, including the involvement of individuals across campus in contributing to the region. Further, there are organizational
benefits from a systems thinking and complementarity perspective of this broad and interconnected vision for engagement.

**Contributions to research and implications for future research**

This study makes a number of contributions to the scholarship of engagement and regional stewardship. First, it creates a model for looking at the many contributions of a comprehensive university in relation to its community. This can help practitioners and researchers by having an outline of the ways in which these universities contribute to their communities. A second contribution of this study is that it explores two ways in which comprehensive universities seek to enact their aim of contributing to the community. In particular, it provides an exploration of the regional stewardship mission, first by providing two in-depth descriptions of the work of universities that are engaged in regional stewardship, and then by considering how this vision comes to be implemented and institutionalized on campus. Further, it compares the regional stewardship mission to a different, narrower conception of a comprehensive’s mission.

Third, this study suggests some new ways of considering community engagement at universities. By introducing the concepts of systems thinking and complementarity, this study suggests that a broader focus, with a consideration of how different aspects of an engagement strategy interact, may help us to more fully understand how engagement and regional contributions occur on campuses.

Further, while much of the engagement literature sees the contribution of universities to their cities and regions primarily through individual engagement strategies (e.g., service-learning or community partnerships), this research highlights the way that
intentionally preparing students in areas of regional needs serves a very important regional need. While all universities graduate students, these regional comprehensives are particularly aware of the needs of their regions and seek to tailor the output of their graduates to these needs. These universities are increasing their programs even in fields that cost more to train students—such as nursing—because these degrees are needed in the region. This alignment is consistent with the notion of regional stewardship, in which the university’s priorities are responsive to the needs of the region, but also consistent with the notion of serving the public good by educating students. Thus, while recognizing the many contributions that universities can make through regional stewardship and other engagement work, such as through university-community partnerships or outreach efforts, this study foregrounds the importance of educating students in areas of regional needs. This way of contributing to the city and region is particularly important in light of the economic imperative to increase baccalaureate attainment rates.

This study suggests many promising avenues for future research. First, there is a need to study more comprehensive universities that align themselves with the regional stewardship mission. The general concept of regional stewardship can be implemented in countless ways—perhaps as many ways as there are universities seeking to be regional stewards. Examining how others animate this mission would be instructive. Second, it would be helpful to more fully understand the thinking and perspectives of those in the community, region, and policymaking arena. While this study had a limited amount of input of community members, it was beyond the scope to fully explore the viewpoints of individuals in these groups. Third, future research should further address the
organizational theory literature, operationalizing it more fully in the higher education setting. The concepts of systems thinking and complementarity have been applied to evaluate companies in the management literature (e.g., Hansen, 1999), and similar research could perform such research in higher education. This could both extend our understanding of higher education and contribute to this interdisciplinary literature.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the need for future research would be to measure the outcomes of the regional engagement efforts at these universities. This study examined the conceptions of those involved in community engagement at these universities, and the strategies they put in place to contribute to their regions. Measuring outcomes of the universities involved in regional stewardship would be instructive, though this is difficult because it would require determining appropriate outcome metrics. In many instances knowing whether or not to “count” a particular activity as engagement, or how much to count it, requires an understanding of the context and rationale for the activity. For example, many of the indicators noted above of a campus committed to regional stewardship, many are programs, practices, or structures that are not unique to engaged campuses. Many universities—even those not particularly focused on regional engagement—could point to programs and practices in which their faculty are involved in the region. For example, any school of nursing or school of social work will have students and faculty engaged in the community. The director of the Center for Civic Engagement at Northern Kentucky University, Mark Neikirk, noted the challenge of measuring engagement at comprehensive institutions: “there are very few things that go on here that are unique to NKU.” However, he argued that at comprehensives like NKU that are intent on engaging with the region, there would be more emphasis placed on
these activities, with more encouragement and value placed upon them. Educational researchers are left, then, with the challenge of determining how to measure an engaged campus: many universities can point to examples of engagement across the campus, but measuring their intensity, pervasiveness, and embeddedness remains elusive. As Votruba noted in regard to measuring community engagement, “I have been at this for a long time, and the measures still have not been found on this work.” Thus, determining a university’s level of engagement—evaluating the outcomes—cannot be a simple checklist or a cursory summary of a university’s action, but must understand a university’s work in a wide array of areas and to an appropriate depth to characterize engagement. An attempt to evaluate campuses on their engagement was made by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. In 2008 it introduced an elective classification to designate engaged institutions. It required universities to fill out an application detailing the ways in which their university was engaged with the community across a broad number of areas, with the assumption that only universities engaged broadly and deeply will be able to demonstrate such across-the-board commitment. Critics, however, might argue that any large university could fill out such a survey, finding enough examples of engagement to meet their criteria. Therefore, a challenge for future research will be to continue to grapple with how to measure engagement.

Implications for practice and policy

There are a number of implications for practice from this study. First, it offers practitioners a way of considering the many contributions that their campuses can and do make to the public. Second, it provides a detailed look at some of the promises and
challenges to implementing a vision for regional stewardship or a narrower mission on campus. It outlines some of the ways that a regional stewardship mission might provide benefits from legitimated and complementary actions.

In addition, this research suggests at least five strategies that campuses seeking to adopt a vision of regional stewardship should keep in mind. First, leaders should ensure that individuals across campus recognize the ways that their work contributes to the regional stewardship mission. A regional engagement mission entails contributions in areas across the “full breadth of the university’s mission” (Beere, Votruba, & Wells, 2011). It should be clear that this work is a main part of the president’s vision for how the university can contribute to the region, and that it is part of the university’s core work, not an add-on or extra initiative. Second, engagement should be incentivized and encouraged. The university must signal through policies (e.g., tenure and promotion) and the creation of new programs to support engagement (e.g., faculty development initiatives or programs such as NKU’s philanthropy class series) that it is interested in incentivizing and supporting engagement. Encouraging departments to put engagement in their annual plans and tying it to assessment makes them more likely that they will follow-through on their commitments to engagement. Third, successful engagement efforts can be helped by funding. Whether it is a statewide engagement fund like that of NKU or small grants to support service-learning development at UTB, funding can be a powerful motivator. Fourth, a successful strategy for regional engagement must be institutionalized. Both ideological and structural supports must help to support a culture in which engagement is valued and begins to move toward becoming a central part of “who we are.” Further, long-term institutionalization can be encouraged by ensuring that engagement is not
leader-dependent. Finally, administrators should consider their engagement strategy as an entire system, considering both the ways in which different programs and structures complement one another. Also, administrators should consider the network structure of their universities and ensure that they support the positive communication of information and norms on campus.
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