

# **Examining Our Interdependence: Community Partners' Motivations to Participate in Academic Outreach**

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## **Abstract**

Although the literature on institutional civic engagement within higher education is quite extensive, the community perspective on such endeavors remains an underdeveloped area of study. This is particularly true of outreach programs emanating from the university intended to support college preparation of under-represented students. The purpose of this study was to explore the motivations of high school professionals for participating in university outreach programs, and to understand how these individuals view their partnerships with higher education at a time when public funding for education at all levels is under siege. Moving beyond partnership models that strictly focus on one organization's need for resources from the other, the findings here point to civic interdependence as the lens by which we can understand community partners' reasons for collaborating with higher education institutions.

## **Introduction**

The title of Derek Bok's 1982 book, *Beyond the Ivory Tower*, is at once a call to arms for institutions of higher education to engage their local communities and a recognition of the historical distance colleges and universities have put between themselves and the outside world. Because higher education has historically been seen as a venue for the modeling of democratic ideals, proponents of community engagement focus on its capacity to take on the challenge of our most pressing social needs (Harkavy, 2004; Maurana & Goldenberg, 1996; *National Task Force on Civic Learning*, 2012; Nyden, 2003). This is particularly relevant to addressing educational advancement among those from backgrounds that typically are underrepresented in postsecondary study. Rather than accepting that K-12 and higher education occupy separate domains, proponents of a strong pipeline believe that colleges and universities must act to prepare low-income students and students of color to advance past high school (Gándara, 2002, 2005; Tierney & Jun, 2001). Thus, efforts to blur the boundaries separating college campuses from their primary and secondary counterparts are motivated not only by potential benefits to the

individual institutions, but by a sense of the social responsibility that higher education is mandated to accept.

In particular, this issue of college access among underrepresented youth is pertinent for both the K-12 population and the university constituency. As the income gap in the United States continues to grow, access to college for low-income students becomes increasingly vital if we are to meet the democratic demands of a diverse society. That said, affirmative action programs to increase minority enrollment in 4-year institutions have been eliminated in many states, leaving underrepresented students, many of whom lack financial resources, at a severe disadvantage in their pursuit of a college education (*Gándara, 2005; Hurtado & Cade, 2001; Pusser, 2001*). Thus, while K-12 schools become majority minority, 4-year colleges and universities admit a student population that is increasingly less diverse and subsequently risk becoming irrelevant to the underserved youth within their regions.

Recognizing this problem, most institutions of higher education have developed college preparation outreach programs in an attempt to reverse the opportunity gap. In fact, educators and policymakers are placing increasing hopes on early intervention programs to enlarge the pool of eligible applicants from underrepresented communities (*Gándara, 2002*). However, at a time of substantial budgetary reductions to higher education from the public sector, “nonessential” programs are likely to face the sharpest blades, which means that such institutional efforts as offering assistance to underrepresented youth in preparing for and gaining admission to college will probably see smaller budgets and declining support, all while the colleges face a pool of applicants that continues to grow. In essence, the need is growing while the resources to meet the need are declining.

Accordingly, if higher education is to continue to work toward reducing the postsecondary access gap, it is necessary to know just how important such efforts are for those in the schools who rely on such assistance. This is not merely an economic issue. Beyond the need for resources, higher education needs to demonstrate that it is accountable to the public interest. Improving underrepresented students’ educational trajectories represents a relevant and tangible realization of public commitments on the part of colleges and universities to support their local communities.

In order to understand how institutions of higher education are maintaining their community partnerships for this purpose, it is necessary that we glean some comprehension of what these rela-

tionships mean for the teachers and counselors who work directly with local colleges to help their students. "The continued involvement of community partnerships with higher education institutions requires attention to their motivations and perceptions of the benefits of the partners from their own perspective" (Sandy, 2007, p. 5). Therefore, this study attempted to bring to light the rationale among school personnel for participating in efforts to improve college eligibility among underrepresented students.

For the purposes of this study, two outreach programs emanating from one public, urban higher education institution were examined to better understand the community partners' motivations to collaborate. In its own way, each program seeks to develop college aspirations among high school students, and better prepare them for the college application process. With the understanding that access to the university's resources may not be the sole impetus, a modification of resource dependence theory was employed to gain a more nuanced understanding of partner motivations, extending the explanation beyond a simple economic model of resource acquisition. Likewise, the study explored how participation in outreach programs affected community members' overall views of the postsecondary institution and its commitment to addressing social issues within the community. Two research questions guided the study:

1. Why do community partners participate in college preparation outreach?
2. How is motivation to participate in outreach programs affected by the community partners' views of the university's commitment to diversity and social responsibility?

## Background

The frameworks for successful community-campus partnerships illuminated in many studies were established by examining the nature of those relationships (Bingle & Hatcher, 2002; Clayton, Bingle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010; CCPH Board of Directors, 2013; Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Wolff & Maurana, 2001), specifically looking at the elements required for successful partnership. Although the literature is not extensive, studies have also been conducted that focus on the motivations of the partnering bodies, with differing findings based on the constituency. Universities, for example, may enter into community-building relationships because they fear that further deterioration in the community will encroach upon

their safety. In addition, the enhanced connection to the community that comes with engagement often helps to build trust and goodwill with other constituencies, such as politicians, business leaders, and other influential citizens (Clayton *et al.*, 2010; Cox, 2000; Harkavy, 1998). Trust is especially relevant for academic outreach: The number of stakeholders involved, and often a history of exploitive relationships between universities and urban communities, requires the laying of groundwork before student outcomes can be achieved (Jarsky, McDonough, & Núñez, 2009; Mayfield, Hellwig, & Banks, 1999).

Previous studies that have examined academic outreach relationships between higher education and community constituencies have tended to focus on the elements needed for true partnerships to emerge. Among the necessary components, as outlined in the literature, are a system of trust (González & Moll, 2002; Grubb, Lara, & Valdez, 2002; Yonezawa, Jones, & Mehan, 2002), demonstrating respect for community resources (Tierney, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001), a structure of regular communication (Gándara, 2002; Gándara & Moreno, 2002; Kezar, 2011), and the development of shared goals (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002). However, explorations of these elements still do not focus on community members' motives for collaboration. Instead, the concentration is on the structural norms of such efforts.

For community stakeholders, varying factors often motivate participation in the university's broad community engagement efforts. The most obvious motivation falls under what Kecskes (2006) terms the hierarchist frame, where the partner needs help in delivering services to their clientele, and the college is seen as possessing valued resources. Most community partners for efforts such as service-learning or academic outreach are nonprofit organizations or schools, which are historically understaffed. Help from university students or staff can increase such entities' capacity for their programmatic work (Bell & Carlson, 2009; Edwards, Mooney, & Heald, 2001). This is particularly true for participating in academic outreach, where specific outcomes are anticipated (e.g., more students applying to and being accepted into college).

Similarly, many believe that establishing relationships with their higher education counterparts may result in gaining access to university resources down the road (such as knowledge, money, or access to decision makers), which the stakeholders either do not possess at all or are in short supply of (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Bell & Carlson, 2009; Cox, 2000; Edwards, Mooney, & Heald, 2001; Sandy, 2007). Connections to administrators, faculty members, and

the latest research all emerge as important goals. This arrangement creates a power imbalance between the institution as resource provider and the community organization as recipient, but because the access desired often comes at no direct monetary cost, community partners may consider any potential difficulty arising from the imbalance to be worth the risk.

Because a central purpose of this study was understanding why school personnel participate in outreach programs emanating from the university, a theoretical framework was needed. The findings revealed that a need for resources, and particularly for college preparation support, was a guiding impetus for collaborating. That said, although resource dependence theory explains much of the motivation to establish and sustain interorganizational relationships, its focus on power dynamics between partners is not as relevant to the partnerships studied here as is the belief common to both organizations that access to higher education for underrepresented students must be broadened, a goal driven by a desire for social justice and social transformation. Therefore, I propose a modification to resource dependence theory that captures the collaborative nature of such partnerships, which I term *civic interdependence*.

## Civic Interdependence

In order to understand the interdependency between a university and its local schools, we must first be aware of the dynamics that exist when one organization is dependent upon another. Defining resource dependency, Johnson (1995) states: "The resource dependence argument suggests that a given organization will respond to and become *dependent* on those organizations or entities in its environment that control *resources* which are both critical to its operation and over which it has limited control" (p. 1). In considering such a structure, most point to Emerson's (1962) treatise on power imbalances that can emerge when two or more organizations establish an association. For Emerson, power is a factor of one actor's dependence on another. (This is true for individuals and organizations, both of which can be considered singular actors under Emerson's description.) Actor A depends on actor B if his aspirations can be achieved only through appropriate actions taken by B. In such a relationship, B is the more powerful partner. Emerson described dependence thus: "(Dab). The dependence of actor A upon actor B is (1) directly proportional to A's *motivational investment* in goals mediated by B, and (2) inversely proportional to the *availability* of those goals to A outside of the A-B relation" (p. 32). Correspondingly, the power of actor B over actor

A ( $Pba$ ) is defined by the resistance from A that can be overcome by B. Therefore, the power of B over A is directly attributable to A's dependence on B. "In short, power resides implicitly in the other's dependency" (p. 32).

In dependent relationships, power between the parties can either be balanced or unbalanced. However, unbalanced relationships are unstable due to the power differentials, which in turn cause cost reduction steps, balancing operations, or both. Thus, because resource acquisition can be unpredictable, organizations will take action to make the stream of incoming essential resources more stable.

In an attempt to increase the certainty surrounding the flow of critical resources into the organization, reduce dysfunctional relationships of dependence shared with other organizations, and in effect increase organizational autonomy within its environment, strategic decisions are made by organizational leaders to minimize the constraints imposed by the environment. (*Johnson, 1995, p. 8*)

Accordingly, the importance of the exchanges between organizations varies for the parties involved. Some are trivial, whereas others are essential. Depending on the exchange balance, the relationship between organizations can take various forms: dependent, reciprocal, or dominant (*Johnson, 1995*).

In the case of academic outreach from higher education to secondary schools, it would appear on the surface that colleges and universities have a dominant relationship with their school partners because of the resources that they provide to the schools. However, although the schools in one of the programs detailed below are dependent upon the university for the resources it provides, it is also true that the university is dependent on these schools to fulfill both its community engagement goals and its desire for a more diverse student body. In the other program studied here, the university's dependence on the schools is even greater because it relies on the teachers and counselors at the schools to implement the programmatic activities. Therefore, it is posited that rather than a one-way resource-dependent relationship, the relationship between the schools and the university is one of interdependence, reinforcing the P-20 model that does not view the levels of education as separate entities, but rather as links in a chain (*Jarsky et al., 2009; Moran, Cooper, López, & Goza, 2009*).

Therefore, in cases like those studied here, the control of resources is not as important as whatever outcome both partners consider essential. Johnson (1995) highlighted this idea in discussing organizational interdependence. As he stated, because one organization rarely possesses or controls all of the various resources it needs for survival, organizations are interdependent with other organizations. "These assumptions provide an important basis for understanding and conceptualizing the nature of organizational and inter-organizational behavior and activity" (p. 4). Lundin (2007) cited exchange theory as providing a foundation for explaining cooperation, which is a consequence of resource interdependence. Like Johnson, he asserted that a lack of resources ultimately provides the motivation for working together.

An organization will avoid interactions with others if the benefits of cooperation do not exceed the costs, since cooperation is complicated, is costly, and involves a loss of autonomy. But if organization A needs resources from organization B and organization B needs resources from organization A, there is a good chance that cooperation will take place. (Lundin, 2007, p. 652)

What this says, then, is that organizations form partnerships not only out of a need for resources that others possess, but because of shared goals. This is a variation of Emerson's ideas about the role of power in dependent relationships, as it highlights the importance of shared beliefs about the partnership and the environment that affects it. Johnson (1995) pointed out how interdependence is different from traditional thoughts on dependent organizations: "Resource dependence theory assumes that organizational behavior and structures are shaped primarily by materialistic forces. Absent among its advocates are discussions regarding the role of rival influences and determinants, e.g., cultural, ideological and institutional factors and considerations" (p. 16). To this, I might add environmental conditions—for example, cases in which both parties are affected by economic conditions that determine a level of interdependence (or, conversely, a termination of the relationship altogether). Broader social-historical and policy conditions affect educational institutions at all levels and influence not only what they do, but also how they organize to persist in achieving social transformation goals (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012).



Consequently, resource dependence theory's emphasis on power imbalances and what organizations do to reduce their dependencies on other organizations does not fully explain the relationships between schools and their university partners. What emerged in this study, on the other hand, is that although schools do depend on universities for college preparation assistance, they also view the university as having a responsibility to offer such services—that it is part of the social charge of public higher education institutions. So rather than wanting to reduce their dependence on the university, they want as much university engagement as possible.

Similarly, the school partners maintain that the university is dependent on the schools to enact these programs, which serve as a major component in the institution's overall efforts to increase the diversity of its enrollment. Without schools to partner with, the outreach programs would be nonexistent. From a philosophical standpoint, the university seeks to increase the number of schools and students it works with or in other words, to increase its dependency on the schools for prepared students. And yet, environmental constraints—mostly financial—preclude the university from relying on schools without some level of intervention on its part.

Building on Emerson's conception of resource dependency, I suggest that a shared ideology behind the partnership (beyond that of having shared goals for the program outcomes) serves as an important motivation for the relationship to develop. In the face of strong external barriers to fulfilling their collective desires to increase postsecondary access for underrepresented students, personnel at both the school and the university need resources that the other partner institution possesses. But rather than engaging in efforts to decrease dependency, as is apparent in Emerson's model, school and university partners look at collaboration as an aspect of a shared ideology to tackle the access gap together.

Therefore, I proposed that what motivates both the school personnel and the university staff to work together on college preparation programs is a measure of civic interdependence, which is marked by a mutual dependence on resources that partnering organizations possess, as well as a shared belief that the organizations should be working together to achieve social justice aims. Such a framework adds to the civic engagement literature regarding how we view a successful community-campus partnership because it examines not just how the most successful outcomes from the relationship can be achieved, but also why the institutions should collaborate at all.



Research on institutional civic engagement tells us that community partners participate in initiatives like service-learning because they want to educate college students about issues that exist within the community in order to develop the next generation of professionals who will adopt the social change cause. In addition, they see colleges and universities as resource banks from which they can draw support for their work (Barrera, 2008; Bell & Carlson, 2009). However, previous research has failed to provide a theoretical framework to guide our understanding of why school partners participate in academic outreach. Thus, the findings that surfaced in this study present an emergent model of civic interdependence that helps explain the motivation behind the community partners' participation in the two programs under examination here.

## Methods

A case study of two separate outreach programs at a single public research university, which I will refer to as University of the Public (UP), was employed to explore how program variation affected the motivation of community partners to engage (approved as IRB #11-000895). One of UP's programs, University Outreach (UO), sends trained full-time staff and part-time undergraduates into the schools to prepare students for the college application and admissions process, as well as to provide technical assistance to the school's college counseling staff. During the 2010–2011 academic year, the program provided the full range of its services to 39 high schools in the surrounding regions. UO exists as part of a systemwide effort to increase the diversity of enrollment in higher education. Although the specific intention for the program is to prepare underrepresented students for postsecondary educational attendance, participation does not guarantee admission to any institution, nor does it necessarily promote attendance at UP (University Outreach staff are adamant that they are not recruiters). To be admitted to the program, students must meet certain criteria, including coming from a low-income family, attending a school with a limited college prep curriculum, being a first-generation college student, or attending a school with below-average SAT/ACT scores. According to data reported by the program, since 1991 approximately 82% of high school seniors who have participated in UO have gone on to attend a postsecondary institution, 62% have attended a 4-year institution, and 25% have attended a campus within the state's elite public university system.

The other program, Science and Math Outreach (SMO), provides stipends to math and science teachers in high schools and

middle schools, as well as to a small number of college counselors in those schools, to coach students on extracurricular projects, with the intention of developing interest among underrepresented students in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. The hope is that their efforts will result in more of these students graduating from college with STEM degrees. For its part, SMO at UP currently operates in 11 high schools in the geographic area surrounding the university. Because other post-secondary institutions in the region also administer SMO high school programs, the choice of partnering schools is limited to those in close proximity to the university that demonstrate a need for services for educationally disadvantaged students. In addition to tutoring SMO participants after school to prepare them for an annual science competition, the teachers serve as college counselors for students in the program, giving them information on the college application process, financial aid, and the SAT and ACT. Although outcome data for SMO is not as accessible, its website reports that 53% of participants who graduate from high school go on to major in STEM fields in college.

Because the primary goal of this study was to hear directly from community stakeholders about their reasons for participating in outreach efforts, 21 counselors and teachers at partnering schools were interviewed to learn why and how they participate in these programs. In addition, four university program staff members were interviewed in an effort to explore how much agreement exists between school and university partners. Interview questions focused on participants' understanding of the purpose of each program, the length of their participation, and their motivations to participate.

Analyses were first conducted by the specific case (outreach program), followed by a cross-case synthesis. All analyses focused on why the community partners participate in the university's outreach efforts, and how their view of the institution's commitment to a diverse student body and social responsibility affected their interest in participating. In coding the data, I followed a constant comparative methodology in which themes that emerged from the data were compared to one another, both within each case and across the cases (*Babbie, 2007*).

This study presents the findings from these interviews, focusing first on why the school partners want to participate, then moving on to why they think it is important for the university to be engaged in this work. As examined in the theoretical framework, a scenario emerges in which dependence on resources is a driving force

behind the school personnel's decision to involve themselves in these programs; however, these personnel also believe that a level of civic interdependence exists between the institutions based on a shared view that access to postsecondary education needs to be expanded for underrepresented students.

Analysis of the responses in the aggregate yielded rationales for participation that can be divided into four philosophical motivations shared by the school partners and the program staff members: a mutual need for resources, a mutual social responsibility to address the college access gap among underrepresented students, a shared commitment to take on this challenge, and a shared desire to increase the engagement between institutions of higher education and their local schools.

## Results

### Mutual Need for Resources

College counselors in urban public high schools have a nearly impossible job. Faced with thousands of students to advise, they are pressed to transmit information about the college application process to an overwhelming caseload. Although there is no consensus on the counselor-to-student ratio, the research reveals that in urban public high schools, each college counselor will likely have a caseload of no fewer than 300 students and possibly more than a thousand (*McDonough, 2005*). However, a number of the counselors interviewed for this study remarked that they are the only college counselor for their school, typically serving an enrollment of several thousand. Consequently, when asked why they participate in the University Outreach program, the most common response was because it helps ease the burden that has been placed upon them, even to a small extent. Beatrice and Olivia, counselors at two large high schools who have been regular participants in the program for a decade, detailed their need by discussing how the overwhelming number of students they must serve leads them to welcome collaborators who are well-informed, particularly those who can work with the students one-on-one, which helps them achieve the goals laid out for their college centers.

The counselors contended that a program like University Outreach is "indispensable" in reaching far more students than they can by themselves. Roberto, who has participated in the program for 11 years, asserted that the assistance he receives from the program removes some of the burden he faces as the one college

counselor for his school. “They’re, like I said, an extension of my office. And those 90 kids that they counsel are 90 kids I don’t really have to worry about all that much.... It just makes my job a lot easier.”

Indeed, easing the burdens associated with college counseling is a significant attraction to partnering with the university in this way. Because of the overwhelming responsibility that these individuals face, a program that can support them in what they do provides not only a tangible resource, but also helps to remove some of the emotional burden of facing such a steep challenge. “With the outreach that I get from University of the Public, it really, really takes away some of that edge where I’m not so burnt out at the end,” remarked Susan, a counselor for 10 years. The counselors know that they cannot possibly provide college advising to all the students in the school, or even all the students who are or should be college bound. However, a resource like UO allows them to connect with more of their students. Said one counselor, “They [the counselors at the schools] work for a very large population of students. And so, to have that help is just a godsend.” Echoing this sentiment, Loretta wondered aloud whether the same number of underrepresented students would receive counseling at her school:

I see them [UO] as part of my personal support system. And I see the effectiveness of what they’re doing with my students.... And I worry if they weren’t there, how many students would be reached and get that guidance and support, because I know that I can’t do it all.

This point is not lost on the University Outreach staff at UP, who shared the concerns over the need for counseling services in the schools. Because their mission is to increase the number of underrepresented students in higher education, they do not want to see college counseling fall by the wayside. If that happens, they know that these students will not receive the information they need to navigate the college application process. Gerardo, a senior site manager for UO, commented on that fact: “If we were not there, I think they would be extremely overwhelmed. In my opinion, that’s the best reason [the counselors participate].”

The motivations for the teachers and counselors who participate in Science and Math Outreach are somewhat different from those who work with University Outreach. Because this program is established as a way to increase student interest in the STEM fields by eliciting participation in math and engineering competitions

such as model bridge building, there is not a sense of feeling overwhelmed by the task at hand. Rather, they see SMO as a resource in helping them teach their subject matter in a manner that extends beyond the classroom, which dovetails with the program's goal to support state standards in science and math. Accordingly, a major attraction for those in the schools is having the opportunity to teach the theoretical concepts of their disciplines in a hands-on approach that often makes the material more comprehensible for their students.

Reflecting on how the SMO projects supplement the learning in the classroom, Enrique, a math teacher at City High, said that connection is something he takes into consideration both as a teacher and as an SMO project coordinator: "Whatever I do in the classroom, I'm always thinking about 'How is this going to help them do this project better, or how is this project going to enhance their learning in the classroom?'" Ernesto, who had just completed his first year as an SMO coordinator, expressed a similar sentiment: "Well, I think SMO makes you think about what you teach in a different way. Again, you start thinking outside of the classroom." It is this aspect of reaching students who may not normally be interested in these disciplines that is most intriguing about the SMO program for the teachers and counselors who participate. At many of the partnering schools, opportunities like SMO are not common, so being able to organize students outside the classroom for a scholarly purpose is a welcome change. "Whether they recognize it or not, they're learning a lot of concepts that they wouldn't probably grasp from theory only," says Victoria, one of the SMO counselors interviewed. Like the counselors who collaborate with University Outreach, the participants in SMO see the program as providing a resource that allows them to approach their jobs differently. Enersto remarked, "Because, you know, I'm a math teacher, and I love math and I wanted these kids to see that there didn't have to be just the formulas in the textbook—it has more to it than that. So getting them to use their hands and think outside of the classroom and outside the box and building things and getting more hands-on was something I was excited about."

## **Mutual Responsibility to Increase Access for Underrepresented Students**

All of the reasons for participating in an outreach program outlined above are factors reflecting limited resources within the schools. If provided with enough time, money, and manpower, the schools probably could provide for their students without the aid

of a higher education partner. However, the school partners do not just see this as a matter of resource acquisition. They believe that their university partners should shoulder some of the burden involved in increasing the number of underrepresented students gaining admission to college, and therefore it is the university's responsibility to use its own unique attributes to address this social problem. For example, interviewees repeatedly mentioned a resource that cannot be duplicated by the school personnel: the prestige that accompanies a university-based program. The cachet that comes with the university is a stronger influence with the students and, moreover, "the inside information" is an important element when it comes time to discuss the application process with parents. Roberto shared, "They're very valuable because a lot of students, they hear my voice a lot. But sometimes—and even parents—when they hear it from a UP rep or UP person, it just has more weight and they listen more carefully."

The staff from University Outreach recognized this fact, and they understand what it means for the students they work with at the schools. As Ingrid, a UO site coordinator, pointed out, this is an important reason for the collaboration between the partnering institutions:

The connection that we have, that we create between the school and the university—I think that's a big thing too. I mean, a lot of stuff they can say themselves, but if somebody from UP or somebody from the university says it, it means different things to the students.

The attachment to an institution with the name value of University of the Public also emerges as an important factor for SMO. For the teachers and counselors recruiting students to participate in the SMO activities, citing the source of the program is a benefit. "And, of course, the name UP—it's a big attractor for the kids too... I think that's a huge magnet to the program because it is attached to a top university," said Victoria.

The prestige of these programs is not lost on the school partners, either. The teachers who serve as SMO coordinators at their respective schools appreciate being a part of a larger effort.

I really like that it's state-backed. It's not just a little high school initiative that nobody knows about. To me, there's power in that. And I hadn't really realized that until I got into it... I wouldn't want to start a little sci-

ence club that nobody knew about. I want to be part of a national movement.

This sentiment from Robert, a teacher at Pacific Point High School, demonstrates what it means for both him and the school to be involved with such an initiative. Another SMO teacher echoed this sentiment: “It’s good for the school. It looks good that we participate in that kind of thing.”

Despite the prestige factor, it is also true that the school partners do not feel as though there exists a one-way dependence, such that the university does not benefit from the association. On the contrary, the counselors and teachers interviewed saw the programs as collaborations in which reciprocal benefits, and thus mutual dependencies, exist. Sandra asserted, “We could easily go to [a local private university], who has a lot more money, and they’re much more resourceful, but that’s where everybody is going.” The importance of this sentiment cannot be overstated. It is evident that those involved in the partnership share in the mission of a public university to take on the challenge of this work. In essence, the university would be in a worse position without the participation of those in the schools. Thus, the two cases studied here demonstrate that the relationship between parties is not based on a struggle for control. Rather, the collaborations reflect a shared philosophy about the need to close the access gap and who bears the responsibility for doing so.

In many cases, this shared philosophy reflects that the counselors, teachers, and outreach staff members know what it is like to be an underrepresented student trying to navigate the college admissions process. A number of the teachers and counselors in these two programs reported that they do so because of what they went through as teenagers. Enrique, a teacher serving as a SMO coordinator at City High, explained how he sees himself in his students:

Because I’m much like them. I come from a similar background, and I went into a technical major, and I know how difficult it was for me as a physics major and not having the necessary tools to survive in things such as physics.

Like Enrique, Tina, who has partnered with UO for 17 years, indicated that her dedication to this work came out of her own experience of being uninformed about the college application process as



a high school student. She knows how confusing it can be and is therefore motivated to ease the process for her students.

For these participants, involvement in outreach programs is a way to make improved educational outcomes more likely for their students. This may also be why one third of the informants have participated in outreach programs in addition to University Outreach or Science and Math Outreach. They see a significant value in partnering with local institutions of higher education and as noted in the previous section, they can certainly use the help. They appreciate that a university like UP is willing to work with their school districts to provide assistance in reaching their goals. But beyond that, as this study has revealed, these school partners believe that the university, particularly as a public institution, has a responsibility to increase access to higher education for their students.

I think it's the responsibility of UP to make sure they're taking a good look and giving these kids who may be marginal, somewhat, [a chance]. You know, let's say you want a 2200 [based on a perfect score of 2400] on the SAT. I would give an African American or a Hispanic kid who got an 1850—I'd give them a chance. Because that kid has been disadvantaged so much. They simply cannot keep up with kids who have gone to private schools on the East Coast, been tutored all through life by the best. Our Blacks and our Browns coming out of public schools cannot keep up with them. And it is the responsibility of University of the Public to try to help them, mentor them on our campuses, tutor them on our campuses, and then you will get a few more of them entering, whether it's Black or Brown.

This statement by Andrea in many ways sums up how the school partners feel about the responsibility of higher education institutions to address the access gap. They do not see it as a problem that exists solely within the K-12 system. On the contrary, they view postsecondary institutions as having as important a role in solving this problem as their primary- and secondary-level counterparts. The idea that colleges and universities should exist as the "ivory tower" simply does not play well in schools where it is a daily struggle to provide even a satisfactory education. As noted above, these schools have limited resources to offer their students. They need the help that institutions of higher education can pro-

vide, which means that they want the universities to be more attentive to this issue. "I truly think that higher education needs to be more accessible to students, especially the students that come from these communities," remarked one counselor.

It is through discussing the school partners' beliefs about the role of higher education in addressing the access gap that the interdependence of these organizations is most evident. Although the schools know that they are responsible for preparing their students for a higher level of education, they are also confident that postsecondary institutions have a mandate to help in this effort. This is especially true for a public school like UP, as Linda, the counselor at Riley High School, asserts: "Gosh, as it functions as an arm of the government, because it is a state-run school, I do think so, yes.... We pay tax dollars, and this is a community in our state. This is a subpopulation of our state." Or, as Roberto commented, "I think they're aware that they have an obligation to make it accessible to the residents of [the state]." The community partners clearly believe that these institutions are responsible for working with the schools to improve the chances for underrepresented students. And if the universities are going to do that through programs like University Outreach, they need the schools' collaboration.

Beyond preparing underrepresented students for admission to postsecondary study, higher education has much to gain from assisting in these efforts, according to the school partners. A number of the counselors who participate in University Outreach noted UP's publicly stated diversity goals for its campus, among them that the university should be reflective of the surrounding population. Of course, what that means more than anything else is that the school should have a student enrollment that encompasses a variety of racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and income backgrounds. In order to reach these goals, the institution cannot restrict its focus to that which happens on campus. As college counselor Susan observed, the only way for UP to remain as a prestigious and a diverse institution is for it to engage the local community: "So you know, if you want to claim that you want to be culturally diverse and educationally diverse, then you're going to have to extend yourself, especially in areas that don't automatically get that information." Perhaps for that reason, the counselors see a program like University Outreach as not only being responsible for working with those students who may be eligible to apply to UP, but also for helping those students who may have a better chance of getting into colleges viewed as less prestigious. One counselor commented, "Well, if they don't, who's going to do it?"

Not surprisingly, given the shared ideology regarding the need for more services for students in these high schools, the UO staff at UP agreed that they have an obligation to do this work, particularly as a public university. But as Ingrid claimed, for UP as an urban institution, the responsibility is most closely felt at home. “To see a university that’s in a city that might not have its own residents going to school, it’s like, ‘Why aren’t they doing the same thing that they’re doing with the rest of the world, with science and everything, in their own community?’”

The school partners who work with Science and Math Outreach have a similar view of the university’s responsibility to reach out to those beyond the campus. Enrique, an SMO coordinator at City High School, is adamant that the university should be engaging the schools in this way:

We are interdependent and they should help out the community and they should make sure that everybody in the community has equal access. They [the students] should be ready to go to college, and they [the university] should get them ready to go to college and make sure they have those programs out there. No, they don’t have to because, I mean, let’s face it, they get more applicants than they ever need.... So they don’t need to. However, I think they should.

In many ways, the comments by the school partners reveal a moral implication for these types of partnerships. For many of them, this is not about altruism, or even “giving back.” Rather, working to reduce the access gap is one of the central purposes for the existence of these public institutions, as a counselor at Pacific Point High School who works with students in the SMO program asserted:

Sure. That’s why they are in the job that they are in. You’re there to serve. You’re a public university, right? And, you’re there to serve the public. Bottom line. And, to build leaders and to give everyone an opportunity to do something with their lives.

## **Shared Commitment to Addressing the Educational Access Gap**

The website description of the statewide program makes it clear that the university’s mission for University Outreach is to

supplement a systemwide effort to see more underrepresented students gaining admission to college. Reflecting the university's commitment to expanding opportunities for these students, the program staff members make themselves accessible to all the students at their partnering schools, not just those who have been chosen to participate in specific program activities. Because the university considers this a distinctive characteristic of the program, it is reflected in the service agreement text. "We are there to be a support to the school and not 'exclusively' for [UO] students but any student, parent or school personnel seeking college prep information."

The university's stated commitment to its goals indicates that it depends on the schools to carry out this task. Under Emerson's (1962) conception of resource dependency, this places the schools in a position of power over the university, for if the schools chose not to participate, UP would not be able to perform its outreach responsibilities. However, the school partners share the university's desire to expand opportunities for their students and therefore, as a result of their interdependence, are generally pleased with UP's commitment to this cause. In the college counselors' view, a program like UO represents the university's dedication to increasing the diversity on campus so the student body will better reflect the demographic makeup of the state. That is why a program like this, which helps prepare underrepresented students to be competitively eligible for admission to a 4-year university, is so important. Through their partnership, the school personnel believe that UP is committed to meeting these diversity outcomes.

Many college counselors agreed with the perspective of a long-time partner who said the university is doing what it should given that personnel on campus have publicly expressed a commitment for the university to become more diverse:

So if you're going to claim one thing, you've got to be able to back it up. They're claiming it, and they're backing it up. If they didn't care about being culturally diverse, if that was not one of their goals ... then it would be okay. But that's not what they say. If you're going to be true to your philosophy, then you have to provide some kind of access for them (the students).

The university's commitment to increasing access for students who may struggle to get into college is also a common sentiment among those who partner with the Science and Math Outreach

program. To Ines, a teacher at Flower High, the university's sponsorship of a program like SMO makes that dedication obvious. "Well, I mean the program is supposed to be for underrepresented students, you know, to expose them to science, so... I don't know why they would request that type of student if that wasn't who they were looking to help."

Demonstrating a shared commitment becomes particularly important when outside forces threaten to damage existing partnerships. In an era of funding cuts to higher education, programs like these often are viewed as a low priority. The school partners understand that the programs have faced budgetary rollbacks in recent years and now must operate in a different fashion. But rather than sully their view of the institution's commitment to providing support to the schools, it has made them more appreciative that the university continues to do what it can to improve their students' chances. Nan, a counselor at Valley High, says that is reflective of the institution's social responsibility:

I really commend them, because this has been a tough time for them, I know, with all the cuts. And they've all hung in there, and I think that really speaks to me about their level of commitment and their desire to continue this program and really make it something valid and relevant for all of us.

In some ways, this dedication on the part of the university in the face of reduced resources has made the school partners even more loyal toward their university counterparts. Therefore, they want to stand up for what UP has meant for them and the students that they work with, as evidenced by Randy, a counselor and former student at UP:

When you first called me, I was pretty skeptical of what your perspective was of the program, because due to cuts, you can tell the state perspective is [that the program is] nonessential. But from the school site perspective and from the alumni perspective and from the UP student perspective, it is definitely essential. I was just at African American alumni graduation this past Saturday or Sunday. Two of my students from that freshman class were walking across that stage [at] UP.... So I'm saying there's programs, though it may not be a huge benefit,

a huge help, every bit helps, and you're seeing a return on your investment.

## Desire to Increase Engagement

Research on exchange relationships between organizations suggests that collaborations rarely exist solely within a dyadic association. Rather, most organizations belong to exchange networks, in which participant interaction with one partner impacts the entire network. "Networks are composed of exchange relations that are *connected* to the extent that exchange in one relation affects or is affected by the nature of the exchange in another relation" (Cook, Cheshire, & Gerbasi, 2006, p. 195). By Emerson's (1962) conception, participating in exchange networks is a method of reducing the power that any one organization may have over another because such participation provides alternative avenues for resource acquisition. For many urban high schools, participating in multiple academic outreach programs through multiple colleges and universities could be interpreted as an attempt to reduce their dependency on any one resource provider. However, the results of this study indicate that school partners do not want less engagement with their higher education partners. Rather, because of their positive experiences collaborating, they desire more support from each of their local colleges and universities.

For example, many of the counselors who participate in University Outreach discussed how thankful they are for what the program provides to them and their students. Olivia was satisfied with the support that she has received from the program so far, but she would love to get more:

I've been very happy with the program. It is one of the best programs that we have on our campus to offer the students.... I just hope that we're able to maintain as an office and we're able to work with them and if we have them twice a week next year that would be amazing. But if we have them once a week then I will deal with what we have.

Rather than lament their reliance on an outside source to provide the level of advising that their school needs, the college counselors were profuse in their praise for University Outreach and what it has meant for them as educators. Susan, a veteran college counselor who has worked with various university-based programs, put it

concisely: "I mean, the partnership is just really second to none.... I don't know where I would be without UP University Outreach."

The teachers and counselors who participate in Science and Math Outreach were less adamant in expressing their aspirations to continue their affiliation with University of the Public, a difference that may reflect the nature of the respective programs rather than a lesser desire to carry on as SMO coordinators. In other words, UO provides support for what the counselors do on a daily basis, which represents a thick level of partnership. The counselors' comments indicated that if the program were eliminated altogether, it would be exceptionally damaging to their abilities to provide the level of college advising that they want for their schools. Science and Math Outreach, on the other hand, represents a thinner level of partnership, largely because it is an extracurricular activity for both the students and the teachers, which means that the teachers can still perform their "day jobs" without this added resource. In fact, to a certain degree, SMO represents what might be better seen as a *delegation* of responsibilities from the university to the school partners than a true collaborative partnership. If SMO were to be eliminated, it would be missed by the program coordinators in the schools and the students who participate in the competitions, but the teachers and counselors would still be able to tend to their regular jobs much as they did before they agreed to participate. That said, the findings in this study do reveal that the SMO participants see the program as a significant and important supplement to their work. Consequently, like their UO counterparts, the SMO coordinators expressed a general sense that they would like to continue, and perhaps even extend, their association.

For instance, one teacher, Robert, who has worked with various constituencies at the University of the Public campus to help him in teaching his science classes, expressed interest in bringing in more UP students to serve as tutors. Robert understands the challenge of navigating the university bureaucracy to take advantage of the resources available and considers the benefits worth the trouble. As he put it, he would like to "harness that energy" that the UP students provide.

## Discussion

Academic outreach of various types is ubiquitous within higher education, particularly at public institutions. At UP, University Outreach and Science and Math Outreach are only two of dozens of efforts by faculty, staff, and students to improve the educational tra-



jectories of underrepresented students. The findings presented here are linked specifically to the cases examined, but we can reasonably project that the school personnel would welcome multiple associations with UP as long as they provide quality assistance. School personnel see the university as a valuable partner in helping prepare their students to gain admission to college and for them, these programs represent a reliance that the school partners are happy to have. Moreover, they believe that their higher education counterparts share this reliance. Thus, instead of being defined by resource dependence on the part of the schools, these associations appear to be better characterized as instances of true interdependence.

The modification of resource dependence theory that this study put forward provides insight into why high school college counselors and teachers collaborate with university personnel to provide academic preparation. Staff in urban public high schools face steep odds in preparing their students to become college eligible and to be competitive applicants to universities in the state and across the country. However, the school partners revealed that they work with their local universities not merely to gain needed resources, but because they believe that higher education has a responsibility to address the access gap, and therefore the university needs the school collaborators in order to perform its civic duties. Thus, the idea of a civic interdependence emerges as a more accurate understanding of these partnerships than a simple rationale that the schools will take whatever help they can get.

Extending this framework beyond college preparation outreach, this idea of reciprocity in the benefits received and the assets shared between the partners is vital to our understanding of the ways colleges and universities interact with their local communities. It is not sufficient that those on campus analyze their programs solely in terms of the outcomes produced within the community. The findings here suggest that greater emphasis needs to be placed on how such collaborations affect the university itself. If, for example, these counselors and teachers believe that they are helping the university reach its diversity goals with respect to student enrollment, how might we analyze other civic engagement efforts happening in higher education? This model suggests that these collaborations are just as necessary for the achievement of the university's priorities as they are for realizing change in the community.

The school partners' belief that colleges and universities, particularly public institutions, share their own social responsibility to address the postsecondary access gap among underrepresented

students may come as a surprise to those on campus not connected to such work. In an era of one-off community service trips and a growing interest in teaching philanthropy as civic engagement, particularly to undergraduates, the findings here place greater emphasis on commitment and accountability over charity. Collaborations with community are about more than allowing the university constituency to feel good about itself, or providing positive public relations stories. They are, as has emerged here, a measure of the institution's social responsibility. They are essential.

### **Future Research and Limitations**

The two cases examined here represent just two of the many variations of academic outreach emanating from higher education. And the findings presented, although significant, represent the opinions of a small number of school personnel who work with the university on a daily basis. To better understand the scope of partners' perspectives on academic outreach, further research should be conducted on the motivations of school personnel who work with programs not represented here, such as the federal initiatives Upward Bound and GEAR UP. In addition, further research is needed on school partners' motivation to collaborate with other institutional types. Moving beyond the social responsibility of public campuses for broad educational outcomes, more needs to be known about counselors' and teachers' perspectives on the schools' relationships with private institutions. Since both programs studied here seek to get underrepresented students into 4-year institutions, further research is similarly needed regarding school partners' views on collaborations with community colleges.

This is ultimately a study about institutional civic engagement. Although we have a good sense of why colleges and universities undertake such efforts (*Astin, 1999; Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2000; Brukaradt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2004; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993*), our understanding of the motivations among community partners is limited (*Cruz & Giles, 2000; Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2003; Sandy, 2007; Stoecker, Tryon, & Hilgendorf, 2009; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000*). Therefore, the civic interdependence framework that has emerged here provides a lens through which we can examine the motives behind all types of community collaboration. Although the framework applies to an initiative like academic outreach in which the community partner receives a tangible benefit, more research needs to be undertaken to test the theory in different contexts. For example, would this same framework apply to relationships with sites that accept students as interns? Could we incor-

porate it into our examinations of service-learning or community-based research? As further inquiry brings the community partner perspective into focus, it will be critical to the success and sustainability of such efforts to comprehend not only the community members' practical reasons for connecting with higher education, but their philosophical motives as well.

## **Conclusion**

As outlined here, academic outreach, particularly college preparation programs, can serve a great purpose in our urban schools when performed correctly and when those responsible for the programs demonstrate a shared commitment with their school counterparts to address the college access gap. Clearly, persistent efforts like these can overcome the substantial barriers to achieving some amount of social justice by helping to produce more equity in educational access. Those in higher education need not only reflect on the reasons they engage but explore why those in the community want to participate. Rather than simply being born out of a mutual interest in collaborating, often these efforts reflect the participants' belief that the university and the community need to collaborate to address some of our most pressing social issues, on campus and beyond.

If we accept such assertions, then we begin to reevaluate how colleges and universities are responsible to our local communities. The hierarchical perspective typically applied to relationships between postsecondary institutions and their local communities, with the institution seen as resource rich and the community viewed in terms of deficiencies, begins to break down, yielding a perspective in which the power dynamic between the two is more balanced. The results of this study reflect such a view: Community members do not express a desire to level the playing field between the institutions, but rather operate from the standpoint that the field is already level, at least in terms of the obligation to address the issue at hand.

When those in the university take ownership of issues like college access, it shifts the approach because it shifts the priorities. No longer do such efforts represent initiatives undertaken because they look or feel good. Rather, they reflect a belief in the university's shared responsibility with its neighbors, and they become an essential component of the postsecondary institution's strategy to realize its purpose. At a time of increased calls for colleges and universities to be accountable, it is vital that this perspective be understood. If

we are to argue for the social and democratic necessity of higher education, the culture must turn toward a belief in our interdependence with our local communities.

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