Community Engagement in a Neoliberal Paradigm

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Abstract

Studying community engagement provides another lens for examining how neoliberal universities collaborate with external organizations to move closer to the market, often in the hope of promoting the public good. This study examined the tension between the public and private aspects of university–community partnerships by studying the impact of neoliberal policies and logic on the design and implementation of these partnerships at two land-grant universities. Findings suggest that community engagement scholars and practitioners need to be sensitive to pressures from declining resources and their influences on higher education, including their impacts on community partnerships. In response to pressures to generate revenue and capture external resources, scholars and practitioners must balance reproducing dominant paradigms, developing quasi-market partnerships, and promoting public good through engagement practices.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, higher education has responded to neoliberal pressures by making incremental changes to the organization and financing of colleges and universities. As a theory, Harvey *(2005)* described neoliberalism as

> political economic practices that propose that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. *(p. 2)*

According to Harvey's framing of neoliberalism, practices such as implementing and regulating social welfare programs (education, health care, public works, etc.) should be the responsibility of the market rather than the state. He recommended that the government should only concern itself with economic matters. Peters *(2011)* suggested that neoliberalism pits the liberal ideologies of

community and individualism against each other. Just as Harvey recognized that neoliberal market practices promise to provide for the collective, Peters suggested that neoliberalism prioritizes the individual and family over the community. Neoliberal logics, or taken-for-granted cognitive beliefs or practices that shape social action by defining what is normal, emphasize the market and weaken the role of the state. They replace ideals of public interest and democratic responsibility with the ideals of individual responsibility, competition, and efficiency *(Fallis, 2007; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Newfield, 2008)*.

As higher education reacted to neoliberalism by privatizing, raising tuition, and commodifying knowledge production, a group of concerned scholars, practitioners, and administrators sought to renew higher education's contract with the public and pushed for more relevant knowledge production. These educators created community engagement programs that partnered university programs with public and private organizations "to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good" *(CIC Committee on Engagement, 2005, p. 2)*.

Neoliberalism is a pervasive trend affecting higher education, public policy, and the nonprofit and state organizations involved in community engagement programs. Slaughter and Rhodes *(2004)* suggested that due to various political, economic, and social policies relating to neoliberalism, higher education is shifting from a public good regime characterized by "communalism, universality, the free flow of knowledge, and organized skepticism" *(p. 28)* to an academic capitalism knowledge regime that commodifies knowledge and aligns more closely with the market. Much has been written on neoliberalism and higher education *(Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012; St. John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2013)*, and extensive research has promoted community engagement for its potential to produce public good. However, less scholarship has addressed the intersection of community engagement and neoliberal policies, practices, and logics. As scholars and practitioners strive to institutionalize community engagement as a mutual and reciprocal partnership between universities and the public, it is also important to consider how neoliberalism has the potential to produce public and private practices and alternate versions of academic capitalism.

Conceptual Framework

This study analyzed community engagement as a resistance to academic capitalism knowledge regimes that seek private funding and align closer to market goals and activities, or as a new type of public good combining collective and individual benefits. The research examined the tension between public and private aspects of university–community partnerships by interpreting the influence of neoliberal policies in the form of academic capitalism on the design and implementation of these partnerships. The study focused on two specific questions:

1. How do community-engaged partnerships reflect a public good knowledge regime and/or a new extension of the academic capitalism knowledge regime? Alternatively, how do they represent a combination of the two—that is, an academic capitalist regime that promotes the public good?

2. How do community-engaged partnerships engage in the market or market like behaviors (interstitial organizations, new circuits of knowledge, new flows of resources, managerial capacity) in order to promote funding for the university or to promote the public good?

The conceptual framework of this study intersects public good theory with academic capitalism to study the public and private benefits of community engagement. Recent questions regarding accountability, costs of higher education (to the consumer and public), and the production of knowledge have reignited the public good debate within higher education. Institutions and organizations like the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) highlight higher education's contributions to the public good while advocating for increased state funding. In exchange for being publicly funded, higher education establishes an educated and trained citizenry, reproduces democratic practices, and produces both social and economic outcomes for the public. The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities *(2000)* defined the relationship between the state and higher education as a covenant that "exists to advance the common good" *(p. 9)*. Higher education's commitment to the public is further extended by community engagement's goals:

partnership of college and university knowledge and
resources with those of the public and private sectors
to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity;
enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare
educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic
values and civic responsibility; address critical soci-
etal issues; and contribute to the public good. *(Carnegie
Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2015, p. 2)*

Although community engagement scholars promise the trans-
formation of higher education and society by promoting the public
good, theories relating to the idea of the public good are compli-
cated, conflicting, and sometimes inadequate to study in practice.
As a theory, public good is conceptualized and represented as an
economic, statist, and philosophical concept. Each of these theo-
ries provides some framework to study elements of community
engagement; however, they are also problematic and provide an
incomplete framework for addressing the questions in this study.

Problematizing Public Good

Economists define public good as something that is nonexclud-
able, meaning that no one is prevented from accessing the good,
and that one person's consumption does not impede consumption
by others, as well as something that is nonrivalrous and cannot be
owned or commodified *(Samuelson, 1954; Stiglitz, 1999)*. Addressing
the public good through the lens of economic theory is problematic
because almost nothing is a pure public good. Community engage-
ment strives to be inclusive and promote partnerships that share
voice in decision-making and solutions *(Jacoby, 2003; Sigmon, 1979)*;
however, decreased funding and budget cuts have already encour-
aged higher education extension programs to develop revenue-
generating or fee-based partnerships *(Brown, Otto, & Ouart, 2006)*.
Furthermore, Pusser (*2006*) argued that this economic definition of
public good is incomplete because it contextualizes the public good
within market forces and demands and does not recognize other
public goods such as civic responsibility and the collective good.

The statist perspective *(Calhoun, 2006)* recognizes the public
sphere as controlled by the state and the private sector as con-
trolled by the market. Theorists conceptualize public good based
on distribution, production, ownership, and governance. However,
this definition is as limiting as the neoclassical economic defini-
tion because it is too dualistic. Although the statist perspective
attempts to distinguish between public and private activities by

asking who pays, who governs, and who benefits, these interests are not mutually exclusive. Thus, the statist perspective provides a limited understanding of community engagement's public good.

Conceptions of higher education as a public sphere attempt to reconcile some of the confusion presented by the statist definition. Pusser *(2006)* drew upon Habermas's concept of the public sphere to discuss higher education as a public good. Habermas *(1991)* offered the following description of the public sphere:

> Above all … the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. *(p. 27)*

Pusser suggested that higher education institutions provide space for public spheres that are beyond both state control and the reach of private interests. Understanding higher education as a public sphere and site of contest expands individuals' understanding of the university's role in promoting the public good. The civil rights movement and other social movements originating in higher education demonstrate how public spheres promote critical engagement and create spaces for student and faculty activism.

Defining public good is ambitious and challenging given the current political and economic pressures constraining higher education. Pusser and Habermas's public sphere provides another lens to view higher education's public good as both a process and an outcome. However, they assumed a static relationship between the public and private spheres. Given that neoliberal policies and practices have changed higher education's relationship with the public, the economic, statist, and philosophical perspectives do not provide a complete framework for studying community engagement. Academic capitalism offers another way to analyze how the public and private good is interpreted and negotiated within community engagement practices.

Academic Capitalism

Academic capitalism *(Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004)* theory explains that universities respond to neoliberalism by engaging in market-like behaviors or aligning with market activities to make up for funding decreases from the state. Using interstitial partnerships

between the state, private sector, and intermediating organizations, colleges and universities promote the commodification of knowledge through patents and licensing and the privatization of research. They engage in marketlike behaviors by recruiting students through consumer-focused goals and taking advantage of the opportunity to raise tuition and fees through the promise of prestige and credentials. The academic capitalist knowledge regime, a response to neoliberalism, gains legitimacy at the expense of the traditional public good knowledge regime by valuing private interests (human capital) and benefits (degrees and jobs) rather than the promotion of the collective good (educated citizenry, social value).

Community engagement uses some of the same processes as academic capitalism but focuses on the collective benefits to the community and the university. For example, community engagement develops new circuits of knowledge by situating education and research outside the walls of the ivory tower. Boyer *(1990)*, considered one of the framers of community engagement, spoke of new circuits of knowledge when he introduced four interlocking functions of higher education: scholarship of discovery, scholarship of integration, scholarship of application, and scholarship of teaching. Boyer *(1996)* later added the scholarship of engagement, meaning

> connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, and to our cities.…What's also needed is not just more programs, but a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction in the nation's life. *(pp. 19–20)*

Whereas academic capitalism cautions against the creation of new circuits of knowledge because they threaten the authority of the professoriate, community engagement suggests that new circuits of knowledge strengthen teaching and research by renewing higher education's civic commitment and purpose.

Community engagement also uses intermediary and interstitial organizations to support and develop partnerships. Slaughter and Rhoades *(2004)* discussed academic capitalism as blurring the boundaries between universities, the state, the nonprofit sector, and the market. Their theory identified intermediary and interstitial organizations that work outside the universities to reshape public/private boundaries in order to move universities closer to the market. Organizations like APLU, AASCU, and Campus Compact

serve as intermediating organizations that bring together different sectors—public, nonprofit, and private—to support community engagement. Similarly, community-engaged partnerships act as interstitial organizations because they occupy the space between the university and the nonprofit. Weerts and Sandmann *(2010)* identified community engagement partnerships as boundary-spanning activities that act as a bridge between an organization (in this case, the university) and exchange partners.

Although Boyer *(1996)* cautioned universities about adding more programs to implement his goals, community engagement involves many layers of stakeholders and requires additional managerial capacity. Additional university administrators are needed to operate and manage the partnerships. Academic capitalism suggests that expanded managerial capacity redraws university and corporate sector borders to enable engaging with the market. In many cases, community-engaged partnerships redraw borders between the university and the nonprofit sector. However, normative definitions of community engagement allow for partnerships with other state organizations and corporations. Charging for services and adopting economic development discourses are examples of marketlike behaviors. Traditional public service and outreach programs have already accepted these strategies. Charging for services contrasts with community engagement values of reciprocity and social justice, but it may be an appropriate course of action when programs are underfunded and can be sustained only through additional funding. Community engagement becomes another source of revenue for the public institution.

Slaughter and Rhoades's *(2004)* research on academic capitalism studied the teaching and research mission of higher education, but the implications for public service programs like community engagement remain unexplored. Mars, Slaughter, and Rhoades *(2008)* referenced public service through their study of social entrepreneurialism, but they also recognized private benefits to the faculty and institution in the form of patents and funding that result from the social entrepreneurial curriculum. Although their research acknowledged some combination of public and private good, it mostly focused on the exploitation of students through teaching and research as a manifestation of academic capitalism.

Slaughter and Rhoades *(2004)* recognized that the public good knowledge regime is not perfect and conceded that the academic capitalism knowledge regime does not replace the public good regime completely. Their scholarship also recognized that universities reorient themselves as their environments change. Community

engagement, proclaimed as an important way to renew higher education's commitment to the public, strives to be a pure public good through shared benefits and governance, but in today's political and economic environment, most social welfare programs are a combination of public and private efforts.

As the literature suggests, community engagement is often framed as a public good. However, public good theory is complicated by neoliberalism, and the economic, statist, and philosophic perspectives do not provide a complete conceptual framework. This study used public good theory as a frame for analyzing who benefits, who pays, and who governs to examine how land-grant universities used academic capitalist mechanisms like interstitial and intermediary organizations, new circuits of knowledge, and new flows of resources to implement community engagement programs. More specifically, do community-engaged partnerships use these mechanisms to challenge and resist academic capitalism, or is the narrative shifting to a new type of public good that incorporates neoliberal policies and practices? As both public good and community engagement have been influenced by the neoliberal paradigm, this study used a theoretical framework intersecting academic capitalism and public good theory.

Methods

This study closely examined six community-engagement programs at two land-grant universities to analyze how neoliberal logics, funding constraints, and public good rhetoric impacted the design, implementation, costs, and benefits of these activities. Studying cases at land-grant universities allowed the contextualization of the study at institutions with a historical mission to provide public service. Likewise, both universities have institutionalized community engagement as recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's *(2015)* Community Engagement Classification, which has identified the programs under study as exemplary. This suggests the potential presence of the traditional public good knowledge regime. Interstitial and intermediary organizations, new circuits of knowledge, new flows of resources, managerial capacity, and new discourses within these programs were also studied. These emphases highlight the potential presence of elements of the academic capitalist knowledge regime.

As a qualitative study, the research focused on background stories and themes that cannot be captured by quantitative data alone. As an interpretive multicase study *(Merriam, 1988)*, this research

used thick and rich descriptive data to challenge theoretical and conceptual assumptions. Community-engaged partnerships provided the contextual environment bounding the cases, and multiple sources of data collection (document analysis, interviews, etc.) allowed for study on multiple levels and perspectives of analysis to capture a more holistic perspective on the phenomenon of community engagement in the neoliberal era. Data were collected from the multiple layers and networks of stakeholders and organizations involved in the community-engagement programs.

Data collection primarily involved 33 interviews of key stakeholders (university, community, and program participants) affiliated with community–university partnerships. University and community representatives were asked questions about the program's purpose and goals, development of the partnerships, decision-making processes, funding, and costs/benefits to stakeholders. Program participants were asked similar questions, but they were not asked about the development and decision-making process. Phone interviews included the same questions as face-to-face interviews. Analysis of documents, including annual reports and partnership marketing materials, supplied secondary data. Documents provided the public narrative of the cases, whereas interviews with key stakeholders provided clarification, probing, and a variety of perspectives. Both interviews and documents were purposely selected for the analysis and were collected from March 2011 to August 2011. Approval from the Institutional Review Board was secured to ensure confidentiality of interviewees.

Throughout the data analysis process, dependability and transferability were emphasized. Studying two land-grant institutions in a similar region limited variability between mission and type of institution but provided six community-engagement cases from which to draw inferences based on theory and data. This included looking for disagreements among the participants, assessing negative cases, and identifying alternative explanations for the responses (*Bernard & Ryan, 2010*). Data was triangulated by analyzing multiple perspectives and comparing interviews and documents (*Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999*). As another method of triangulation, data were compared to theory and the conceptual framework.

Site and Sample Selection

The sites for this study were selected because of their strong public service reputation and allocation of resources and funds dedicated to public service. Institutionalization of these programs

implies that they are embedded into the culture and organization of a college or university and have a sense of legitimacy and sustainability, therefore suggesting that the community engagement and public service narrative is not a new trend within the institution *(Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)*. Both Flouride University and Easley University (pseudonyms) are land-grant, 4-year research institutions. Flouride is one of the nation's top public research universities, with enrollments of 15,500 undergraduates and 4,000 graduate students. Easley University is slightly larger than Flouride, enrolling 26,000 undergraduates and 8,000 graduate students.

These institutions are not immune to competing narratives of entrepreneurialism or privatization. Like most public higher education institutions, both sites have dealt with substantial budget cuts from the state. Flouride University responded to these budget cuts with a strategy of "divest to invest" in order to conserve funding for areas focusing on teaching, research, and the economy. Priority areas included recruitment of top students and faculty; student engagement and leadership; research targeting areas that stimulate economic growth; and scholarship focusing on health, energy, transportation, and sustainable environment. Service-learning was mentioned as a priority through student leadership and engagement, but investment in other community engagement and public service programs was missing from the discourse. Likewise, when Easley University was asked to cut $60 million from its budget, many public service and outreach initiatives were at risk of being reduced. Ultimately, most public service and all community-engagement programs survived, but the message still resonates. Programs are now asked to demonstrate their value to the university and state (through income generation or measurable impact) or risk elimination. Both universities utilized public service in their response to state budget cuts; however, Flouride used it as a strategy to divest, whereas Easley stressed its impact on the state through outreach activities.

The six cases were selected based on each university's recommendation, as well as their inclusion in the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. At each site, community-engagement programs were selected through a two-step process using the university's Carnegie Community Engagement Classification application and consultation with a university informant. This process allowed the comparison of a variety of cases within and across institutions. After interviewing university representatives involved in each case, it became clear that most of the cases included more

than one partnership, and studying one would not provide a holistic perspective of individual cases. To better capture the scope of the cases, two partnerships within each were selected, one deemed exemplary and one considered to have the most value. University stakeholders, typically the directors or faculty members responsible for each partnership, were asked to identify "exemplary" and "most valuable" (financially, symbolically, etc.) partnerships. Table 1 provides an overview of the cases and partnerships.

Table 1. *Sample Overview*

Site	Case*	Type	Partnership
Flouride University	Youth Development	Exemplary	K-12 Wellness
		Most Value	Fresh Perspectives
	Technical Writing	Exemplary	Adult Education
		Most Value	Historic Foundation
	Design Studio	Exemplary	Redevelopment Authority
		Most Value	Farmer's Market
Easley University	Economic Development	Exemplary	Town-Gown
		Most Value	Urban
	K-12 Science Education	Exemplary	School 1
		Most Value	School 2
	Design Studio	Exemplary	County Redevelopment Authority
		Value	Land Trust

Note. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the university, case, and partnership.

Flouride Youth Development. One of the largest departments of the public service unit, this partnership exemplifies traditional public service and outreach by supporting over 80 programs focusing on youth development and leadership. Youth Development partners with nonprofits, corporations, and other state-operated agencies. As the most valuable partnership, Fresh Perspectives provides residential programming to single mothers in foster programs. The exemplary partnership K-12 Wellness offers wellness education to elementary-aged children.

Flouride Technical Writing. As an award-winning service-learning course, this case places teams in community-based organizations to write, design, and create communication and technical writing products. This program was initiated in 2003 and has since involved 167 sections of the course, 30 different faculty members, 78 different partners, and 3,500 students. Adult Education, the exemplary partnership, matched teams of students with an adult

education center located 30 minutes from Flouride University. The most valuable partnership studies a project constructed for a historical foundation.

Design studios. Both of the universities coordinated a community-based learning program that used students (both graduate and undergraduate) to work on design problems for community organizations. In general, the programs solicit architecture projects from community organizations. If community organizations are able to pay for the services (approximately $5,000–$15,000), then students serve as consultants to develop conceptual ideas for them. The structure and design process differs depending on the university site.

Flouride Design Studio. Structured as a studio learning experience, Flouride's Design Studio lets undergraduate and graduate students work as "staff" designers on landscape architecture projects. The professor solicits the partnerships and then coordinates the specific details of the project, which are negotiated based on the organization's needs and available funds. Community partners pay a fee that covers a graduate student stipend, as well as any other costs associated with the negotiated project such as travel, food, and production. The exemplary partnership illustrates the design studio's work on a textile community's revitalization plan. The most valuable partnership consisted of several projects: a safe routes to school design for schoolchildren, a farmer's market, and streetscape design.

Easley Design Studio. Easley's program offers undergraduate and graduate students an opportunity to participate in a real-life planning process with community members and decision makers who do not have the resources to hire private firms. Over the course of a weekend, student design teams participate in a rapid, intensive, and creative work session that focuses on a particular design problem and arrives at a collaborative decision. As an academic program, the project is supported in part by tuition funds, and community partners pay the remaining costs (transportation, food, lodging, etc.). The exemplary partnership highlights a project that addressed a design problem associated with gateways and entrances to the town. The partnership with most value focused on an innovative and efficient affordable housing design for the community immediately surrounding the campus.

Easley Economic Development. This program is connected to a larger network of university-based economic development programs located across the country. Economic Development provides

business consulting to aspirant small business owners and training to newly established and established organizations. Economic Development is responsible for 17 satellite offices throughout the state. Half of Economic Development's budget is funded through the federal government, and the university matches this grant with funding from the state. Additional operating expenses are funded through corporate sponsorships and trainings. The local office provides an exemplary partnership, and the urban office partnership was considered to contribute the most value because of the substantial sponsorship it generates from industry located in the state's primary economic region.

Easley K-12 Science Education. As part of a service-learning course, Easley undergraduate and graduate students (mostly science majors) partner with elementary school teachers to assist with science lesson plans and instruction. K-12 Science Education collaborates with eight different elementary schools in the campus area. The exemplary partnership is the oldest partnership and has tremendous support from seasoned teachers and a record of success. The university partner identified the newest partnership as having the most value because it is well supported and respected by the school's administration.

Limitations

Like most qualitative case studies, this research is limited by the inability to generalize themes beyond the specific cases studied and a positivist critique of subjectivity and bias. Generalizability limitations were mitigated by studying six cases at two different universities. Reliability and validity were stressed in all stages of the research process in order to decrease the potential for subjectivity bias. The research design and conceptual framework were grounded in two opposing theoretical frameworks of higher education, public good and academic capitalism, along with triangulation and constant comparison to limit researcher bias.

Findings

Analysis drew on the conceptual framework of community engagement and neoliberalism, as well as public good and academic capitalism theory. The data were inductively analyzed according to types of partnerships related to each case, purpose and need addressed through partnerships, and partnership development. Analysis of the interviews initially included a coding system based on the theoretical framework and research questions *(Bernard &*

Ryan, 2010). Interview transcripts were categorized according to themes reflecting academic capitalism (relationship to the university, market references, new discourses) and public good (partners, purpose and need, benefits, costs). Document analysis included a parallel structured coding framework. Themes mentioned in over half of the data were included in the final analysis. Lesser themes were subcategorized into the broader concepts when appropriate. Following the metacoding process, themes were further categorized according to subthemes using a constant comparison method that searched for similarities and differences across sites and interviews *(Glaser and Strauss, 1967)*. Once this process was completed, themes were interpreted in relation to past literature and the theoretical framework.

Partnerships

Partnerships in this study were initially identified based on the literature's description of a dual exchange of resources between the university and the community. However, as data were collected, it became apparent that the fundamental conceptions of partnerships were not as clear as the literature may suggest and that mutuality and reciprocity were not always the primary motivator for partnerships. Moreover, *community* was not necessarily an entity outside the borders of the university. Instead, community partnerships involved actors representing multiple sectors within and outside the university. The data suggested that the idea of "external" is fluid and varies depending on the perspective of the university program and the space occupied by the partnership. For some programs, partnerships with other university departments were acceptable, whereas other programs positioned themselves as external to the university campus. This highlights the complexity of partnerships intersecting across multiple sectors—nonprofit, government, and private industry. Table 2 provides an overview of the different sectors involved with each case. Both the type and number of partners varied according to the case and the university coordinator's conception of community. They all partnered with other state-sponsored programs and nonprofit organizations, but the design studios were most likely to partner with state-sponsored programs, Youth Development with private business, and Technical Writing and Economic Development with other university programs.

Table 2. *Numbers of Partnership Types Associated With Each Case*

Case	NGOS	State-sponsored organiza-tions	Private business	University
Youth Development	36	44	10	29
Technical Writing	70	26	5	54
Flouride Design Studio	7	15	5	3
Economic Development	0	6	0	12
K-12 Science Education	0	8	0	0
Easley Design Studio	3	69	0	0
Total	116	168	20	98

These partnerships demonstrated elements of community engagement as well as the neoliberal logics that impact best practices of community engagement, such as transformation, reciprocity, and sustainability. Partnerships often exhibited power imbalances resulting from economic and political policies dismantling the state's role in social service delivery. In many cases, for example, the university was reported to be perceived as the wealthier partner, and the community organization was seeking partnership because it faced acute resource shortages. By looking at these partnerships, this study also introduced the concept of quasi-market and state–state partnerships (public and private) that result from decreased state funding for social welfare programs (higher education, nonprofit sector, and other state agencies).

Purpose and Need

Interviewees were asked to identify the purpose or need addressed by the partnership. Responses indicated that funding and the need for expertise were overarching concerns. Subsequently, interviewees discussed strategies to generate funds. The purposes of partnerships included delivering social services, offering charitable pragmatism, transforming communities, and promoting individual student benefits. Many of the partnerships provided more than one type of benefit.

Service delivery partnerships extended university knowledge through consulting and assistance involving contractual obligations and emphasizing transactional exchange (usually economic) rather than transformation. Flouride's Youth Development director described the purpose of the service provider partnership as

> You take your best shot at what you think they [commu-
> nity organizations] need and then you learn. And then
> you respond to it. A service provider who thinks like
> a service provider only provides what they have been
> given to provide.

Similarly, charitable partnerships have a low investment in rela-
tionships and low concerns for root causes *(Morton, 1995)*. They
provide practical utility for organizations, but only short-term
solutions for complex problems. As an example, service-learning
students helped an organization develop projects, but the course
did not require students to reflect on the structural problems neces-
sitating the partnership. In these charitable pragmatic partnerships,
the university organizations found value by authenticating the
public service mission of the land-grant university and accessing
real-world experience for students. Flouride's Youth Development
director explained it in this way: "I mean we are born of the mission
of Flouride. Flouride University wants to support its community.
Help kids. And what good is the university if it is not connected
to the real world?" In contrast, those involved in transformative
partnerships highlighted desires to change society or communi-
ties through their programs. They suggested that social change is
one of the primary goals of their programs, and they justified costs
and decisions based on their hopes for this outcome. The design
studios seek to transform the communities that benefit from the
conceptual designs created by student consultants. Partnerships
in this study held a number of visionary goals: ending childhood
obesity, educating future scientists and engineers, transforming
community organizations, breaking cycles of poverty, and rede-
veloping public lands. Partnerships supporting development of
individual human capital recognized the need for students to apply
university knowledge in real-life situations; doing so contributed to
their future career opportunities. In the design studios, Technical
Writing, and K-12 Science Education, undergraduate and graduate
students sought real-world skills and experiences. In Technical
Writing, students translated these skills in job interviews; in the
design studios, human capital (in the form of semiskilled graduate
students) was exchanged for financial capital to fund the program.

Development of Partnerships

Often, the university coordinator served as a broker who
matched the resources of the university with a community organi-
zation's needs. The coordinator often utilized a spectrum of strate-

gies (from highly coordinated to loosely coordinated) to develop community-engagement partnerships. Both approaches included mechanisms that potentially limited access to community organizations. Structured processes are implemented to meet community organizational needs in an efficient and appropriate manner; however, these processes can also create exclusivity by screening out community organizations that do not have the financial capital to pay for the services. Universities, under financial constraints imposed by budget cuts, can choose partnerships that generate funding or are not costly. Unstructured processes depend on networks and personal relationships with the university. This type of strategy, however, favors organizations with more social capital and whose members have personal connections with the university programs and are therefore aware of the opportunity. As universities attempt to streamline community partnership development, the public service and democratic ethos of community engagement is replaced by the rhetoric of economy and efficiency.

The partnerships studied in these cases were developed through one of three types of process: structured, semistructured, and unstructured. For cases like Youth Development, Economic Development, and Easley's Design Studio, partnerships were formed through structured processes that involved solicitation of community organizations, matching of expertise and interest, and contracts. In semistructured partnerships like Flouride's Design Studio, the coordination involves some intentionality, but the processes are more fluid. For example, they have agreements with community organizations but rely on alumni networks to recruit partners. Less structured processes like Technical Writing and K-12 Science Education informally recruit partners and rely on word-of-mouth and reputation.

Discussion

Neoliberalism, community engagement, and the public good of higher education intersect and intertwine in the findings. Community engagement practices overlap higher education, state social services, and the nonprofit sector, and they are not immune to the neoliberal paradigm's assault on higher education. The findings suggested new discourses of power imbalances and quasi-market partnerships in relation to community engagement and academic capitalism.

Power Imbalances

Nonprofit and other state social welfare programs were affected by neoliberal policy shifts; to sustain their existence and cover their operating budgets, they were forced to raise money by implementing corporate, competitive, and consumer-based models (*Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004*). Nonprofits must split their time between fundraising and mission fulfillment in order to supplement their income. They rely on diverse funding streams in the form of government contracts, fees, and private donors in order to survive and operate *(Salamon, 2002)*. Although the nonprofit sector is diverse and includes organizations of many types, some of which generate large assets through fundraising and fees for services (e.g., hospitals, education), the community organizations represented in the partnerships studied here struggled to secure operating funds. For example, when asked about the primary motivation for entering into partnership with the university, one community partner responded,

> The relational aspect that Flouride, Youth Development, and Department of Social Services have together, allows our program to sustain and weather the economic downturn that we have recently experienced in our country. So we're not necessarily worried about our doors closing because of the partnerships we have.

For these cases, higher education is another way to diversify their funding because they perceive the university to be resource-rich and seek partnerships to generate operating funds. Funding mostly comes indirectly in the form of services that increase their opportunities to capture additional government grants (the design studios), additional fees for services (Technical Writing), and private donors (Youth Development). This situation poses two concerns: (a) power imbalances and (b) sustainability.

When community organizations are underfunded and dependent on partnerships with the university to secure necessary resources, the resulting resource imbalance interferes with community engagement's ideal of shared voice and participation. Sigmon *(1979)* predicted this power imbalance between universities and the community and suggested the community (or recipient of services) control the services being provided. Conversely, Honnet and Poulsen *(1989)* suggested that good partnerships are based on the idea that those with needs define the needs of the relationship. The data demonstrate that this principle of community voice

may be obstructed by the perception that the university has more resources. Technical Writing, and specifically the Adult Education partnership, illustrates the problem of resource imbalance within community-engaged partnerships. In this particular case, the community organization experienced drastic budget cuts from the state and was left with only one full-time staff member. In order to secure more funding from the state, the center needed to increase enrollments or raise money through private support. However, the other remaining teachers taught part-time, so they had limited potential to take on additional projects that would recruit more students. Student assistance from the Technical Writing program was perceived as the center's only option for extra help. A staff member framed the urgency for the partnership this way:

> Well we need everything essentially and we don't have a lot of the resources that… because of the budget cuts and the funding problems.… We just said, here is the situation, we would like for this to grow. We would like for this to become something better. If there is anything that you can do to help, we would appreciate it and that is when they started giving us feedback. So basically anything that they do, we wouldn't be able to do without them.

In this relationship, the Adult Education Center was the recipient of the services. Although the Flouride faculty member said that he tried to include the community voice in the partnership, the community organization was so resource-poor that it had little room to be selective. The community partner noted, "So basically anything that they do, we wouldn't be able to do without them." Essentially, the organization will accept any resource offered because state budget cuts have led to a dearth of resources. In this situation, power in the partnership is unbalanced, and the direction of the partnership is determined by need rather than shared decision making.

Likewise, situating the university as the expert and the community organization as the dependent consumer creates a hierarchy of knowledge. This type of reciprocity reflects an exchange perspective *(Dostilio et al., 2012)* and has the potential to give the university more power, thus subjecting the community organization to the university's goals. Ideally, community engagement scholars strive to achieve transformative partnerships that move away from exchange focus, include community organizations as leaders in

the partnership, transcend individual and private interests, and involve the whole university in the change *(Enos & Morton, 2003).* Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton *(2009)* challenged reciprocal partnerships to be more intentional and include democratic (university as a part of an ecosystem of knowledge production addressing public problem-solving) rather than technocratic (university as the center of public problem-solving) epistemologies. The findings suggest that the partnerships studied favored university expertise and accepted exchange-based relationships in contrast to transformative or democratic partnerships that push cultural and systemic change. In the interviews, community organizations did not seem concerned about these power imbalances because the partnership offered them resources and solutions to their immediate needs. For example, a teacher involved in the K-12 Science Education program described the school's benefit in this way: "It [the partnership] allows for extension and it allows for hand-on activities that you normally couldn't do. Gathering materials that you normally don't have time to do."

When higher education takes over the state's former social service role, the university may not be able to sustain the program. K-12 Science Education and Youth Development's K-12 Wellness program both exemplify this problem. They were established to fulfill service roles no longer funded by the state. For example, K-12 Science Education is based on the assumption that public elementary school teachers are not trained well enough to properly teach science lessons. The program therefore provides university science majors who step in and add expertise and assistance. The schools affiliated with the K-12 Science Education partnerships are dependent on university students to supplement their teaching and ensure that the elementary students are receiving an adequate science education. Similarly, as decreased funding forced public school systems to cut budgets, health education was dropped from the curriculum because schools were unable to pay for health teachers. Youth Development's K-12 Wellness initiative stepped in to aid public school systems by placing wellness coaches in schools. In both of these cases, the universities provided public services no longer offered by the state.

Although replacing the state with the university works as a short-term solution, these partnerships raise concerns regarding sustainability because it is not clear how long institutions will be able to fund such activities. Community organizations perceive the university as having more resources (expertise, human resources, financial resources) than other state agencies and non-

profit organizations, but colleges and universities are also at risk of losing their funding. Total educational appropriations per full-time employee (FTE), estimated using 2014 constant dollars, have decreased 24%, from $8,615 in 1985 to $6,552 in 2014 *(State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2014)*. Universities themselves have looked for alternative funding sources like tuition increases and private donors to make up for lost funds. The states studied experienced, on average, a decrease of more than 32.5% in educational appropriations per FTE from 2008 to 2013 *(State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2013)*.

Reflecting national reports showing steep cuts to public higher education institutions, both of the universities involved in this research recently considered cutting different community-based programs. Easley's Economic Development director expressed concerns about sustainability due to decreased funding from the state. Although the federal grant monies were still available, the university could not support the matching 50% required to receive the funds. Consequently, the university downsized staff and limited its service area. Fears regarding continued sustainability and funding for programs were echoed in almost every case. Some programs already had responded by charging fees; however, others were hesitant to drift from their original service missions. In this situation of decreasing funds at all levels, it is not sustainable for nonprofits and other state agencies to depend on higher education to supplement their income.

Quasi-Market Partnerships

Community-engaged partnerships connect public (university) to public (state agency) as well as the private sector. Neoliberal theorists describe this phenomenon as a "third way" of combining the roles of the state and the market *(Peters, 2011)*. In the social welfare funding system, the government was both the operator and funder of programs. In the neoliberal system, state-run monopolies of public services were broken up, and it was posited that competition promised efficiency. Quasi-markets, composed of for-profits, nonprofits, and private organizations, took over the operation and responsibility of social service delivery.

The cases in this study fit within the category of private–public partnerships and through this collaboration, community organizations and universities situate themselves at a competitive advantage over other organizations. LeGrand *(1991)* identified quasi-markets as occupying a space between the market and the public sector

because they replace the monopolistic state welfare provider with individual providers competing for funding. In this quasi-market, public sector maintenance and state subsidies gave programs in this study a competitive edge. However, community-engaged partnerships are not just private–public, but include new patterns like university–state, university–nonprofit, university–state–nonprofit, university–nonprofit–private, and university–state–nonprofit–private. Generally, the quasi-market partnerships in this case study can be broken down into categories that intersect the market, state, nonprofit, and university. Table 3 lists these types of complex partnership that bring together multiple sectors and provides examples.

Table 3. Types of Quasi-Market Partnerships

Overlapping partnerships	Examples
University–state agency	K-12 Science Education
University–nonprofit	Technical Writing
University–state agency–nonprofit	Flouride & Easley design studios
University–nonprofit–private	Economic Devlopment
University–state agency–nonprofit–private	Youth Development

These quasi-market partnerships position the university as the center node, with corporations, nonprofits, and other state agencies making up the other nodes. Both community organizations and universities access funding sources and additional resources through engagement in these partnerships.

   University–state agency and university–nonprofit. K-12 Science Education and Technical Writing engage in these types of partnerships to exchange human resources. In these two cases, the partnerships reflected Kahkonen's *(2004)* conception of quasi-markets because they were established and maintained by the public sector (university) that subsidizes, regulates, and purchases the service. In these cases, the community organization consumes the services at no cost to clients or community.

   University–state agency–nonprofit. In other cases, like the design studios, the partnership helps individual organizations become more competitive for federal and state contracts. Community partners from both of the design studios mentioned the grants they received as a result of their cross-sector partnerships. In this way, they reflect quasi-market behaviors but add another dimension to Kahkonen's *(2004)* conception of quasi-markets by including the university as the center node of the partnership.

University–nonprofit–private. These types of partnerships expand collaborations to include the private sector. Economic Development depends on both private and public funds. It accesses private support to fund programmatic activities like scholarships and seminars because they promised increased economic activity for the state. Larger businesses are interested in funding these small business initiatives that serve their market need. Economic Development provides a great example of quasi-market logics that join private and public resources in the anticipation of efficiency.

University–state agency–nonprofit–private. Programs like Youth Development organize complex cross-sector coalitions that enable them to access public and private funds through their collaboration. Youth Development's K-12 Wellness partnership combines university, for-profit, state agency, and nonprofit resources to capture corporate and federal funding. This case exemplifies a new type of quasi-market relationship because it involves many different sectors, though it relies on the university infrastructure (in terms of human resource processes, social networking, and fundraising processes) to manage and provide structure.

Even more illustrative is Youth Development's use of partnership with a local businessperson. The K-12 Wellness program began as a social service offered by residents of a gated community who were interested in wellness issues. The businessperson funded the K-12 Wellness partnership as a nonprofit with a trademarked curriculum. As the program expanded and became more organized, participants sought partnership with Flouride to improve and further expand. The corporate partner described the partnership in this way:

> Coming out of a real estate development company background, in reality there is… our credibility even though we knew what we were doing and all the right people connected to us it was only so far that we could really go with it. So we said let's look for a partner to help us perpetuate the message and expand the program.

The trademarked curriculum and brand image of the program was donated to Flouride because the university promised to use its connections and infrastructure to perpetuate and expand the program. The wellness program uses the university's credibility and operates as a subsidiary of the institution, but it is dependent on funding from the corporate partner.

The design studios' and Technical Writing's cross-sector partnerships reflect another quasi-market behavior by offering services to the community organization at lower costs than the private sector. In this way, quasi-market partnerships compete unfairly with the private sector because they are subsidized through the state. The design studios and Technical Writing subsidize the quasi-markets by providing free human capital through student labor labeled "student learning." Likewise, the state subsidizes Economic Development's private consultants through direct federal grants and state appropriations. The design studios are aware of this issue, and Flouride's faculty member suggested that students' work actually supports the private sector by producing future projects for architects:

> We see ourselves as rainmakers for our profession as well.… We don't compete in any way with landscape architects. In fact the idea is to make things happen so that there will be more work in that vein.

The students produce conceptual designs that the community organization can take to professional architects to implement.

Economic Development takes a different perspective. The Economic Development director posited that their assistance is needed because "at this level of the marketplace, there is nobody selling service to them generally of this nature because you can't make any money at it." He proposed that the small businesses they advise are important to the economy because they provide employment opportunities and innovation, so public assistance is necessary. It is not clear whether any other businesses offer consultant services like those provided by Economic Development; however, if such other businesses existed, they would not be subsidized by the state and thus would be at a disadvantage competing with Economic Development's monopoly of the market.

Previous literature has suggested that cross-sector partnerships are difficult to create, sustain, and implement *(Bryan, Crosby, & Stone, 2006),* but as this discussion shows, these quasi-market partnerships can succeed and also offer below-market-price services to community organizations. Both of the university members' responses provide some validation for their services, but they also reinforce neoliberal logics that support the state's involvement in facilitating economic development that provides for the public good. These partnerships cannot disprove interference with the market through public subsidy. Under the guise of community engagement, these

partnerships combine multisector resources to solve problems created by government and market failure. Stakeholders justify Technical Writing's quasi-market behaviors because the community organizations cannot afford private consultants. However, public subsidy quasi-markets like these do not operate like pure markets to promote efficiency. Instead, they create false competition through state subsidies from grants and public university support *(Taylor, Cantwell, & Slaughter, 2013)*. Universities offer office space, administrative support, and student volunteers to implement these partnerships.

Conclusion

Results from this study suggest that practitioners and scholars should consider the ways community engagement is framed, promoted, and studied. Community-engaged partnerships use processes similar to those of academic capitalism but defend them as promoting the public good. For example, community engagement develops new circuits of knowledge by situating education and research outside the walls of the ivory tower and renewing higher education's civic commitment. In contrast, academic capitalism cautions against the creation of new circuits of knowledge because these may shift behavior in ways unintended by policymakers or administrators. Most of the cases studied represent a mixture of both public good and private practice, reflecting that these partnerships have adopted academic capitalist behaviors to make up for lost funding, manage the partnership, and balance the needs of all stakeholders.

Understanding the neoliberal context and influence on community engagement raises practitioner and scholar awareness, complicates the promise of public good, and challenges the means by which universities engage in social change. Market logics and market-like forces impact the ability to build reciprocal partnerships and sustain programs. The rhetoric of social innovation, reform, social movements, or transformation should not be completely abandoned; rather, the neoliberal paradigm and its impact on research and practice should be considered. Sharpening theories and analysis to examine these interwoven logics will help advance theory and practice. Results of this analysis present implications for community organizations, scholars and practitioners, and higher education policy.

Community Organizations

Nonprofit organizations and state agencies have been impacted by neoliberal policies that have changed funding and operations. Community–university partnerships provide nonprofits and state agencies with opportunities to be competitive in quasi-markets and access additional funding. In order to engage in reciprocal partnerships and avoid being exploited, community organizations need to be selective and seek relationships with university programs that provide value to their organization, or that can be converted into financial gains. Technical Writing and K-12 Science Education are examples of these types of partnerships because they provide resources to community organizations without charging for services.

If university programs charge for services, community organizations should identify their potential return on investments. In addition to revenue and other resources generated through the collaboration, community organizations can also use partnerships with the university to access more funding for their programs. Quasi-markets produced through the neoliberal paradigm create competition among organizations for grants and other funding. Therefore, community organizations should engage in relationships that make them more competitive in quasi-markets, thus increasing their long-term return on investments.

Community Engagement Scholars and Practitioners

The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification nationally recognizes colleges and universities for their exemplary community engagement practices, and professional organizations like the International Association for Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE) and Campus Compact further institutionalize community engagement within the field of higher education. Community engagement is institutionalized through rhetoric promoting transformation, social movement, reform, and social innovation. For example, community engagement literature appropriately promotes the inclusion of community voice and reciprocity as one of its core values. Enos and Morton *(2003)* used transformation to describe partnerships that change individuals and organizations. The *Democratic Engagement White Paper (Saltmarsh et al., 2009)* takes this ideal to the next level by promoting partnerships that cocreate knowledge and develop collaborative solutions. All of these ideals are framed within the discourse of public good,

with little attention to the private aspects of community-engaged partnerships.

The rhetoric of community engagement's literature is compelling, but it does not account for neoliberal logics of decreased state support, privatization, and quasi-markets. In these case studies the community engagement discourse was more idealistic than its practice. For example, Technical Writing and K-12 Science Education sought to capture the community organizations' voice in a bilateral planning and implementation process, but the exchange was curbed by the community organization's dependence on the partnership outcomes. Community organizations gained valuable services (human resources, deliverables, products, etc.) that helped them operate and fulfill their missions in the face of scarce resources from the state. In the exchange, universities received private benefits for students entering the neoliberal labor market. In order to compete for jobs after graduation, college graduates need credentials (in the form of degrees) but also benefit from professional skills and experiences. Participation in service-learning classes like Technical Writing, the design studios, and K-12 Science Education allowed students to acquire these skills and use them in graduate school applications and job interviews. University programs are interested in this type of skill development because it provides them value and legitimacy in the academic capitalism knowledge regime. Both community organizations and university programs are affected by the neoliberal paradigm as they design and implement partnerships. Though mutual benefits are achieved, community-engagement ideals like reciprocity are manifested in transactional exchanges that do not in all respects reflect the rhetoric of transformation, cocreation, and bilateral collaboration.

Programs like the design studios challenge community engagement's norm of practice because they are transactional partnerships that charge for services. Community organizations have social power to emphasize their needs because they are paying for their involvement; however, this voice is contained within a provider/client relationship rather than one that focuses on mutual aspirations. Charging for university–community organization exchanges may unintentionally screen out potential partnerships. University programs are forced to balance sustainability through revenue generation with maintaining a public service ethos. The design studios compensate for these different goals by allowing organizations without financial means to nonetheless access the services. Both of the design studios attempt to do this by reserving surplus funds from partnerships that do not cost as much as pre-

dicted and redistributing them to lower-resourced programs. This example demonstrates the impacts of neoliberalism on universities and community organizations, and provides an example of transactional partnerships that creatively promote the public good despite funding restraints.

Focusing on the public good of community engagement while avoiding discussion of private good is neither authentic nor productive. Evidence from this study suggests that community engagement scholars and practitioners should be sensitive to pressures from declining resources and academic capitalism in higher education. It does not suggest that scholars and practitioners should completely abandon the rhetoric of community engagement's potential for social innovation, reform, social movements, or transformation, but rather consider the neoliberal paradigm. In response to pressures to generate revenue and capture external resources, there is a fine line between reproducing the logics of competition and individualism and using logics of privatization and quasi-markets to produce the public good. In order to produce public benefits within the academic capitalist knowledge regime, community engagement must first recognize its impact and become aware of the attendant tensions.

In addition, we must critically examine what types of partnerships fit under the umbrella of community engagement. The 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2015, Community Engagement Classification applications asked universities to identify 15 exemplary partnerships but did not provide guidelines on how to select these partnerships. If we use this classification, and therefore the exemplary partnerships, as indicators of institutionalization, then we risk inadvertently legitimating unilateral academic capitalist programs like Youth Development and Economic Development. These types of partnerships were included in Flouride's and Easley's applications, though data analysis suggested that they do not fit with community engagement's best practices of reciprocity, community voice, and transformation.

Higher Education

Advocates of community engagement correctly situate these initiatives as complementary to and integrative of the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. Since the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 established land-grant colleges, public service has been embedded and institutionalized as an important function of land-grant universities. The scope of this

function has broadened from its purpose of serving farmers of the state through cooperative extension and agricultural trainings to include engaged teaching, research, and scholarship. However, projects such as Economic Development and Youth Development complicate the idea of integrative community–university partnerships because they are ancillary to these institutions' core mission and purpose. In addition to falling short of the bilateral reciprocity that is one of community engagement's best practices, they are not integrative because they have little to no interaction with the academic and research missions of higher education. They instead add a service provider role for higher education institutions.

Higher education is constantly evolving and changing and includes more than teaching and learning responsibilities. Kerr *(2001)* conceptualized the multiversity as a complex enterprise involved in activities such as teaching, developing research partnerships with corporations, managing income generation, and offering public entertainment through athletics. Critics rightfully question higher education's incremental drift from its teaching mission and contract with society *(Readings, 1996; Washburn, 2005)*, and community engagement advocates respond with this new model of public service. Although the service-learning programs in this study attempt to balance public service with teaching, Economic Development and Youth Development move the outreach function further from the core. In a neoliberal paradigm of scarce resources, universities must be cautious of developing and implementing partnerships that are peripheral to their core missions.

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