

# Tactical to Transformational: Reclaiming the Strategic Purpose of a Metropolitan Campus

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## Abstract

In the fall of 2019, our large southeastern metropolitan university launched a campus strategically situated in downtown Orlando. As we all remember, in the spring of 2020, as our campus was starting to build momentum as a student and community-centered hub, the world shut down because of a global pandemic. Our challenges over the last several years have been multifaceted. Our university lost key administrators who championed the efforts of the new campus and we have been trying to reclaim the vision and purpose of this space. We have also had a dearth of faculty engagement at the new campus partly because of so many remote courses and meetings. These challenges impact all stakeholders involved with the downtown campus. To reclaim our purpose, we interviewed key stakeholders ( $N = 21$ ) connected to the university and/or the community to then use their perspectives on the downtown campus as well as their thoughts on community-engaged scholarship (CES) to create a strategic plan to move forward. To code our 188 ( $N = 188$ ) units of analysis we used the six categories of community engagement as identified by Gordon Da Cruz, (2018). These categories include community-identified issues, scholarly investigation of public issues, collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships, collaborative knowledge production, institutional resources for the public good, and integration with faculty scholarship. Our findings reveal the

following breakdown: community-identified issues (n = 12), scholarly investigation of public issues (n = 15), collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships (n = 66), collaborative knowledge production (n = 26), institutional resources for the public good (n = 50), and integration with faculty scholarship (n = 19). We used these distinctions as well as stakeholder suggestions to build a strategic plan and our seven primary goals or objectives for moving forward into our next phase.

**Keywords:** community-engaged scholarship, university-community partnerships, strategic plan

## Introduction

According to our university lore, the Pegasus, one of our distinctive symbols, was selected to represent our institution's vision of limitless possibilities. Historically one of the nation's most innovative universities, our institution was built on the understanding that students also have unlimited potential. As such, investments were made into developing our main campus and strengthening a physical location where the scale was not intimidating, but powerful. When discussions about a new downtown Orlando campus emerged, the same spirit drove administrators to envision a physical space where students could work alongside faculty, community leaders, and policymakers. In Fall 2019, the downtown campus opened and immediately an investment was made to enhance the campus's relationship to community stakeholders.

Early indications of a true transformational space were promising but quickly dreams were re-imagined, and, in many ways, expectations lowered in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Almost immediately student numbers decreased as the campus shut down and momentum toward community-engaged scholarship waned. Since Spring 2020, key university personnel have been working to slowly rebuild a vision for the downtown campus despite budgetary challenges.

The work included in this article represents an initiative by three downtown faculty to interview key university and community stakeholders to gather intel related to the potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of our metropolitan university downtown campus to then create a strategic plan for moving forward as a true community-engaged campus. Data was analyzed around six key components of community-engaged scholarship initially envisioned by Cynthia Gordon da Cruz (2018). The six components are community-identified issues, scholarly investigation of public issues, collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships, collaborative knowledge production, institutional resources for the public good, and integration with faculty scholarship. The literature review presented here explores public scholarship broadly and then moves into a discussion of community-engaged scholarship and the role of the metropolitan university. The review then transitions to provide more depth and detail of Gordon da Cruz's (2018) six community-engaged scholarship components.

This manuscript includes a literature review that focuses on building a rationale for community engaged scholarship as well as university-community partnerships. We then move into a brief overview of public scholarship as a framework for these partnerships. This topic then transitions into a conversation about community-engaged scholarship as a vehicle for stakeholder engagement. Finally, we then move into our actual study and our findings. We end with a discussion of our findings, a potential framework for a strategic plan, and future directions.

## A Rationale for University and Community Partnerships

University and community partnerships continue to be mutually beneficial despite challenges in higher education. As the post-secondary landscape changes, community partnerships have become even more appealing (and important). Sadly, as many are aware, colleges and universities face an uphill battle. Enrollment decreases are prevalent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), degree completion continues to be problematic, and tuition costs continue to increase (College Board, 2017). Even still, universities, especially in the ever-evolving war for enrollment, must innovate (for both financial and student-centered reasons) and part of that innovative or ambitious spirit can include collaborative corporate or community initiatives.

This call for innovation spurred our administrators to envision a new campus that focused on community-engaged scholarship. Ultimately, as a result of grabbing the public's attention by making research relevant and accessible, we might increase enthusiasm for higher education, increase funding, and even increase enrollment (Badgett, 2015). The metropolitan campus can be a supporter and partner of the community by transforming internal structures and re-examining and potentially re-inventing community-facing commitments (Ohmer et al., 2022) while emphasizing research that informs practice.

Using research to inform practice is not a new phenomenon and the applied focus is present in medicine, criminal justice, and social services. Research to practice is truly interdisciplinary and has a renewed interest. For one, there are increasing efforts to disseminate research (Daly & Finnigan, 2014) and at the same time, technology has made it easier for researchers to disseminate findings and for practitioners to access research, collect data, and use the information to guide decisions. Connecting research and practice recognizes an ongoing relationship between the community and scholars. This means, that without community-engaged scholarship, research to practice is not possible or, at the very least, is severely limited. Decisions on how to best use or implement evidence are not made in isolation and, instead, involve actors inside and outside the academy (Penuel & Coburn, 2014). This is why, for our purposes, gathering key stakeholder opinions was a priority.

According to the William T. Grant Foundation, when research is relevant to decision-makers, deliberated over thoughtfully, and embedded in policymaking processes, routines, and tools, the findings are more likely to be used. Unfortunately, we live in an age where research to practice initiatives, in education and other disciplines, can be minimal or altogether forgotten. In a timely *Chronicle* article, Miller (2020) laments the “vast storehouse of creativity and expertise in research universities that is largely untapped by civic and business leaders” (para. 2). Throughout the history of the academy, professors have been viewed as experts first. Miller (2020) believes:

If we want to continue to enjoy the public support that makes scholarship possible, we need to show the world what an incredible resource we can offer for solving today's complex problems. We need to do a much better job telling the story of our research universities. And the best way to do that is to invite the world to engage with our deep bench of knowledge, talent, creativity, and expertise. (para. 11)

We must make research accessible to the public by “drawing back the curtain of our intellectual property, cutting the red tape, and facilitating connections with leaders in public and private sectors” (Miller, 2020, para. 13). The logical question follows, how do we achieve this?

In an age of shrinking university budgets, community partnerships can provide elaborate research funding and avenues for practical, real-world populations. This budgetary provision can be stress-relieving and liberating. The financial freedom provided can allow institutions to pursue other projects that can have a significant impact on current, and future students. But, even more so, community-based partnerships are yet another avenue for faculty and staff to engage in public scholarship.

## **Public Scholarship**

Universities are under continual pressure to prove their worth. In 2017, Pew Research Center reported that 55% of adults believe colleges and universities have a positive impact on American society (hardly an encouraging percentage) while 36% believe universities have a negative impact on society writ large. To address some of these concerns, Brazzell (2019) advocates for a public scholarship that transcends the traditional brick-and-mortar or online university structure. Public scholarship, according to Kezar et al. (2018), “addresses traditional concerns about the gap between research and practice and policy, bridging the divide” (p. 3). We believe this quote adequately encompasses our understanding of public scholarship.

Unfortunately, faculty members face increased university expectations (Strawser & Carpenter, 2019). As a result, faculty may not be able to engage the community as they would like. Thankfully, willing universities can provide appropriate structures and incentives to engage beyond traditional academic borders. By encouraging public scholarship, institutions can reinforce the urgency of applied research both as a means of developing community partners and building additional revenue. Brazzell (2019) reinforces the value of faculty engagement in the community:

prioritizing and investing in engaged scholarship can help universities enhance their reputations, differentiate themselves from other institutions, inspire and engage students and faculty, secure support from funders and policymakers, invigorate alumni investment, and better prepare students to apply their knowledge after graduation (para. 12).

Unfortunately, Badgett (2015) believes the work of the academy is largely self-centered. But the time will come, Badgett says, where we've:

...discovered some new problem that no one has been paying much attention to, we see an injustice that can be righted, we've got a good idea for how to address or even solve some social problem, we hear about a policymaker or public figure who's just gotten a fact or judgement terribly wrong, we think a public debate is missing the point on some issue of the day, or we've got good advice for individuals about how to improve their mental health, physical well-being, or economic status. (pp. 6-7)

In those moments, faculty members need training and empowerment to be unleashed into the public as change agents.

By promoting public scholarship in an innovative and supportive way, our downtown campus can become an advocate for diverse democracy, equity, and social justice (Kezar et al., 2018). Public scholarship and strategic university-community partnerships can lead to genuine change. Universities continue to show various levels of support for public and community engaged scholarship (Paynter, 2022) yet if approached effectively the benefits can be far-reaching.

The concept of public scholarship is not new. In fact, John Dewey has been advocating for scholars to engage democratically with the public to raise awareness of social problems for decades (Dewey, 1916). Kezar et al. (2018) do well to illustrate what is involved in public scholarship. They believe the 'public scholar' includes a faculty member who appears on media outlets, a researcher working with local teachers to develop an intensive reading problem based on research, a scholar who testifies before Congress, or a professor who serves on, or leads, a national board. The avenues are endless and in our initial proposal we focused on the professor who works with local teachers to develop an intensive reading program based on research (i.e., research-to-practice communication strategies) but, the problem, and more so the opportunities, are not just limited to education. Imagine the potential changes for our community if scholars and subject-matter experts interacted with community audiences to enhance and disseminate meaningful research.

Metropolitan universities have an opportunity not just to be part of the public scholarship movement but to lead it. In 2009, Derek Bok said this about the detached academy:

Armed with the security of tenure and the time to study the world with care, professors would appear to have a unique opportunity to act as society's scouts to signal impending problems long before they are visible to others. Yet rarely have members of the academy succeeded in discovering the emerging issues and bringing them vividly to the attention of the public. The very complexity of modern life requires more, not less, information; more, not less, participation. (pp. 76-77)

We believe, like Kezar et al. (2018):

Researchers must make a conscious effort to ethically and appropriately contribute to and serve the communities that they study. Without this deliberate focus, even the most significant, timely, and methodologically rigorous study will miss the important opportunity to critically engage with diverse publics. (p. 16)

Unfortunately, many faculty members want to engage, but do not know where to begin (Badgett, 2015). And, in our case, we have an entire campus yearning for connection with their neighbors but minimal structures and no vision for how to achieve this end. Community-engaged scholarship, a subset of public scholarship, may allow us to conceptualize our end goal as a downtown advocate, supporter, and collaborator.

## **Community-Engaged Scholarship and Stakeholder Engagement**

On an even more practical level, universities can engage strategically in community-engaged scholarship (CES). CES is frequently recommended as a practice for producing knowledge to address real-world problems (Gordon da Cruz, 2018). Gordon La Cruz (2018) goes on to provide a specific definition of community-engaged scholarship that is helpful to consider:

Broadly defined, CES refers to mutually beneficial partnerships between universities and communities designed with the intention to collaboratively develop and apply knowledge to address consequential public issues, like police violence and inequitable access to education. (p. 148)

Ultimately, community-engaged scholarship is collaboratively driven with the community to help solve complex problems (Nicotera et al., 2022).

Like other institutions, our university struggled to adapt to the new world forcibly created by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ohmer et al., 2022). Our context though was a bit unique. In the Fall of 2019, our university opened a campus in the heart of downtown Orlando. This campus idea, originally conceived in 2014, was a top-down initiative. Academic programs were specifically selected to move downtown in hopes of bringing a greater level of engagement to community partners. Unfortunately, the dream of the downtown presence was not made in unison or partnership with many community stakeholders despite including a listening tour as part of the original vision. In their 2023 article, Kuttner, Rawlings, & Washington emphasized the importance of stakeholder alignment when considering community-engaged scholarship. Their call to engage as many voices as possible helped frame our research questions for this study.

RQ1: What are the perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of our downtown university campus pertaining to community-engaged scholarship?

RQ2: How can our downtown campus reimagine university partnerships and community-engaged scholarship?

These two research questions are foundational to our study. We were able to code answers to our questions using a framework for previous qualitative research used in community-engaged scholarship and, we allowed the responses by participants to frame a potential strategic plan for our downtown community-engaged scholarship initiatives, something we hope will be beneficial for readers.

## Methods

For this study, we employed a content analysis methodology to examine the interview and survey responses. Two independent coders were trained using a detailed codebook to ensure consistency in the application of coding categories. To measure intercoder reliability, we calculated Cohen's kappa, which yielded a value of  $k=.81$ , a measure indicating excellent agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). This high level of intercoder reliability ensures that the findings are robust and that the coding process was executed with a high degree of precision.

Participants were a mix of individuals internal and external to the university. In total, we interviewed 21 ( $N = 21$ ) institutional and community stakeholders. Data was collected over the summer of 2023. We used a semi-structured interview process. Questions for interview participants and survey respondents followed a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) framework. The questions are below.

*Think about UCF Downtown, as a campus and as a collection of individual academic units embedded in the downtown Orlando area. What are the strengths of UCF Downtown as they relate to research for and with the community?*

*Continuing to think about UCF Downtown, what are the weaknesses of UCF Downtown as they relate to research for and with the community?*

*Now think about the communities, organizations, and neighborhoods around UCF Downtown. What opportunities exist for UCF Downtown to leverage ideas, funding, people, space, or anything else as they relate to research for and with the community?*

*Continuing to think about the communities, etc., around UCF Downtown, what challenges exist for UCF Downtown that might hinder the ability to leverage various resources as they relate to research for and with the community?*

*To close, if you were to state one or two goals for UCF Downtown related to research for and with the community, what would those goals be?*



The interviews did consist of some follow-up questions but were still generally organized around these strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats categories. We did not ask demographic questions of our participants.

The two trained coders then coded the data. First, responses were separated according to their location in the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) framework. Then we coded responses according to the six categories of community engagement as identified by Gordon Da Cruz, (2018). Again, these categories include community-identified issues, scholarly investigation of public issues, collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships, collaborative knowledge production, institutional resources for the public good, and integration with faculty scholarship. Each unit of analysis was coded into only one of the categories. Coders also differentiated a response as either positive or negative, or as a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat. For example, a negative response that served as a response to weaknesses of community-engaged research in the downtown campus and indicated the university's lack of communication with communities to identify issues pertinent to the community is coded as community-identified issues. In the same vein, a positive response about the strength of community-engaged research that illustrated partnership and mutual benefit between the community and University is coded as collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships. But, to emphasize the clarity of results, we have included how responses were coded according to the six CES categories.

## Results

The analysis of our study reveals that the most prominent theme among the coded responses was the emphasis on collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships, with 66 units of analysis focused on this area. This was followed by a significant focus on institutional resources for the public good, accounting for 50 coded responses, and collaborative knowledge production, which garnered 26 responses. Other key areas included integration with faculty scholarship (n = 19), scholarly investigation of public issues (n = 15), and community-identified issues (n = 12). Overall, there were 188 total units of analysis, highlighting the diverse perspectives of our stakeholders, including community members, faculty, and staff.

In general, our participants underscored the importance of these community engaged partnerships, particularly in enhancing both current and future scholarly collaborations. A recurring theme was the critical role of the physical location of these partnerships, especially those in proximity to our downtown campus, as a determinant of more effective engagement. Additionally, the discussion around institutional resources for the public good was frequently highlighted as respondents discussed the necessity for services that enable direct community participation. Our findings suggest that stakeholders view our downtown campus as a hub for community-engaged scholarship, with numerous opportunities for expanding and deepening

these collaborative efforts. The remaining content in our results section further explores each theme and provides sample quotes for each of the six themes. The codes and their frequency are summarized in Table 1.

**TABLE 1.** Coding categories, code descriptions, number of coded responses

<b>Codebook Category</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Number of Coded Responses</b>
C1: Community-Identified Issues	Covers who should select the public issues on which to focus.	12 (6% of total responses)
C2: Scholarly Investigation of Public Issues	Focuses on the importance of conducting scholarly investigations of real-life public issues and/or producing scholarship about such issues.	15 (8% of total responses)
C3: Collaborative and Mutually Beneficial Community-University Partnerships	Focuses on important characteristics of community-university partnerships specifically the importance of partnerships that are collaborative and mutually beneficial.	66 (35% of total responses)
C4: Collaborative Knowledge Production	Focuses on the location of knowledge produced. The key here is the collaborative production of knowledge.	26 (14% of total responses)
C5: Institutional Resources for the Public Good	Connecting institutional resources and knowledge with community knowledge and true identification to solve real life public issues.	50 (27% of total responses)
C6: Integration with Faculty Scholarship	Community-based research or project be integrated with and forward the faculty member's scholarship.	19 (10% of total responses)
		188 total units of analysis

To help illustrate how different responses were coded, we are including three sample quotes for each CES category. The tables below include the coding category as well as three distinct sample quotes from different respondents.

**TABLE 2.** Community-identified issues and sample quotes

<b>Coding Category and Description</b>	<b>Sample Quote 1</b>	<b>Sample Quote 2</b>	<b>Sample Quote 3</b>
C1: Community-Identified Issues  Covers who should select the public issues on which to focus.	(Faculty and administrators need to consider) what will be a hot button term or a politicized comment because we must address the needs of our children and of our communities.	(We need to) engage a broad stakeholder base within the Downtown community to articulate goals from local needs. (We need to) develop action plans to address and synergize multiple communities to address these needs. We also need to explore/invite those who are already invested and working in these spaces (e.g., grants, programs, service learning, etc.) to share their work, their vision, and their ideas for next steps.	Before the campus opened there was a large kind of listening tour there that happened to see what the community needed and how to best integrate into the community.

These six categories used to code our data help contextualize what constitutes community-engaged scholarship, recommendations for strategies to practice CES, as well as goals or outcomes of community-engaged scholarship. This first coding category highlights who should select the public issues that demand focus. In this regard, our stakeholders highlight community members, faculty, and staff as key voices to select issues that could be addressed through more purposeful community-engaged scholarship.

**TABLE 3.** Scholarly investigation of public issues and sample quotes

<b>Coding Category and Description</b>	<b>Sample Quote 1</b>	<b>Sample Quote 2</b>	<b>Sample Quote 3</b>
C2: Scholarly Investigation of Public Issues  Focuses on the importance of conducting scholarly	More dedicated research space, courses, and activities for faculty and students to develop and enhance synergy for research initiatives fostered in	We are in the state of Florida, where there are less resources for the public sector to serve the underserved. However, we want to define that that there is	(We need to) consider working with those already working in the area and build upon the work started.

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investigations of real-life public issues and/or producing scholarship about such issues.	proximity to the UCF Downtown campus is needed.	a real opportunity to inform that work or, you know, to produce research that helps us understand again the strengths and the needs.
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The second coding category, the scholarly investigation of public issues, focuses on the importance of conducting scholarly investigations of real-life public issues and/or producing scholarship about such issues. The main thrust of most of the responses here indicated a deeply rooted desire to enhance current and future scholarly partnerships.

**TABLE 4.** Collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships and sample quotes

<b>Coding Category and Description</b>	<b>Sample Quote 1</b>	<b>Sample Quote 2</b>	<b>Sample Quote 3</b>
C3: Collaborative and Mutually Beneficial Community-University Partnerships  Focuses on important characteristics of community-university partnerships specifically the importance of partnerships that are collaborative and mutually beneficial.	We have great potential for collaboration, proximity, and resources within our central Florida and Orlando communities.	With the access that we have with the commitment of our faculty that we have with the current initiatives going on I absolutely think that there are amazing research initiatives that will inform our field not just in education, but certainly for local communities.	We need to establish an authentic collective research partnership to increase the community's economic stability, and benefit residents, which slows gentrification.

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The third coding category, collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships focuses on important characteristics of community-university partnerships specifically the importance of partnerships that are collaborative and mutually beneficial. This was by far the most prominent coding category we identified through our analysis. Throughout, our respondents focused on key distinctions of our community-university partnerships, both in the present and those with potential for future development.

**TABLE 5.** Collaborative knowledge production and sample quotes

<b>Coding Category and Description</b>	<b>Sample Quote 1</b>	<b>Sample Quote 2</b>	<b>Sample Quote 3</b>
C4: Collaborative Knowledge Production Focuses on the location of knowledge produced. The key here is the collaborative production of knowledge.	We have several potential issues. For one a lack of investment in research projects targeting vulnerable populations. We also have a lack of collaboration between schools or academic departments. And we lack interest in promoting participatory action research and conferences.	We (students and faculty) tend to start these projects (with community members), and then their semester is over, or their dissertation is finished, and then we're with an unfinished project or product and we (the community) have no idea what research came out of it. We have no idea what ideas were born, nor what the next plan is. There was no longevity. There was no sustainability, and there was no follow through, and I think that is certainly an opportunity that I would that I would voice is that you need to go in with an I toward longevity and follow through. Just because you're done doesn't mean the relationship should be done.	We need to be better at working with students to create youth initiatives/task force as well as an incubator space for residents to run small businesses.

Table 5 highlights the responses related to collaborative knowledge production, which focuses on the location of knowledge produced. The key here is the collaborative production of knowledge, but our participants focused on the location, specifically the physical location, of the collaboration, especially as it relates to serving spaces near our downtown campus.

**TABLE 6.** Institutional resources for the public good and sample quotes

<b>Coding Category and Description</b>	<b>Sample Quote 1</b>	<b>Sample Quote 2</b>	<b>Sample Quote 3</b>
C5: Institutional Resources for the Public Good  Connecting institutional resources and knowledge with community knowledge and true identification to solve real life public issues.	I like the fact that members of the community can go to the library and check out books. All they need to do is show that they live nearby and things like that.	Orlando struggles with what it is and if we really want to be a true metropolitan city, you know, like be up there with the other like middle size or mid-size cities and really be progressive or forward thinking then you really need to think about what it means to be a downtown campus and you need to have more inclusive spaces where community organizations, families, that there's some programming that engages, that again, just really puts a spotlight on the surrounding community. I think the more and more we involve the surrounding community we can see (ourselves) as a true Metropolitan University.	There is no central office of which downtown stakeholders are aware to contact if they want to collaborate with UCF faculty or need help from UCF faculty.

The responses related to institutional resources for the public good again focused primarily on institutional services, or the lack of them, that allows for direct community participation. Institutional resources for the public good refer to ideas about connecting institutional resources and knowledge with community knowledge and true identification to solve real-life public issues. Some responses were philosophical in this regard, while others were more practical.

**TABLE 7.** Integration with faculty scholarship and sample quotes

<b>Coding Category and Description</b>	<b>Sample Quote 1</b>	<b>Sample Quote 2</b>	<b>Sample Quote 3</b>
C6: Integration with Faculty Scholarship  Community-based research or project should be integrated with and forward the faculty member’s scholarship.	The federally funded USDOE research and development partnership between CCIE and the Orange County School District is about to end after 5 years of development and research. Sustaining many of the innovations and continued research focused on teacher recruitment, development, and retention within urban, Title 1 schools could be enhanced, sustained, and researched if connections and plans for continuation were implemented.	I just this week came from Tampa. They have an office of communication and partnerships. It serves the whole school, the whole university. And so, we talked at length about that, and just helping faculty, like seminars or workshops or figure out a way to help faculty see how they could connect what they're already doing to the community.	We've got great buildings. We just must be very clear about some of the barriers that exist and what we need to develop to encourage synergistic communities of practice for faculty. Then the research and courses and classroom opportunities, learning opportunities for our students as well should come to fruition.

The final coding category, represented in Table 7, is the integration of community engagement with faculty scholarship. This category focuses on how community-based research or projects can be integrated with and forward the faculty member’s scholarship. Respondents included pre-existing examples of ongoing projects as well as new ideas or potential frontiers for our campus that we are not utilizing.

Our analysis revealed several diverse ways our stakeholders view both the current manifestations of community-engaged scholarship on our downtown campus as well as potential opportunities for growth and development. Our task, once we coded responses, was to then use this data to create a strategic plan for our metropolitan campus moving forward. We have included our strategic initiatives in the discussion.

### **Discussion: The Emergence of a Strategic Plan**

In many ways, the quotes speak for themselves and reveal some frustration from stakeholders in key areas, including a lack of a central hub or office to help downtown faculty engage the community, an unclear focus on what community-engaged scholarship is, how the new downtown campus can engage community members and partners, and generally a lack of sustained support for faculty members. Many of the recommendations in our study mirror a 2019 study by Lovell et al. about strategically connecting a university to a community. Some overlap includes recommendations to:

- Create a single access point or database to track interactions with the community;
- Recognize engagement as a contributor to promotion and tenure;
- Provide a mechanism to approve innovative grants, contracts, and partnerships efficiently; and
- Create a model and infrastructure for effective communication across campus.

There are, however, other suggestions we received from our stakeholders that we can use to transform our downtown campus mission. We agree with Ohmer et al. (2022) that the main intent is to bring university resources together with the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, enhance curriculum, prepare educated and engaged citizens, strengthen civic responsibility, and address societal issues while contributing to the public good. How do we accomplish this, especially considering the challenges we have mentioned throughout this article?

Our end goal with this stakeholder engagement was to create a strategic plan to reclaim the mission of our downtown metropolitan university. Based on stakeholder response, we have developed seven strategic goals to revitalize our current efforts and establish a more strategic focus moving forward. We believe the suggestions here will be beneficial for those like-minded institutions looking to explore new pathways and clarify their mission. We have structured our strategic plan initiatives into seven goals with individual strategies to help us achieve these overarching ideas.

### **Goal 1: Open Exchange of Information**

Strategy:

- Create a community bulletin board for university and community stakeholders to post opportunities for shared activity or needs.
- Build a fully customized website for social impact.
- Update the downtown campus website and add a page titled “Resources for Community.”
- Convene a monthly conversation that includes faculty, staff, students, and community stakeholders.
- Develop and produce a monthly podcast featuring conversations with researchers and their community partners.
- Conduct regular workshops and lectures free for the community.



## **Goal 2: Shared Space for Community and University Stakeholders**

### Strategy:

- Establish a walk-in community room for meetings and consultations.
- Designate one meeting room for community groups to reserve and use at no cost.
- Improve signage that shows downtown campus locations and clearly marks campus facilities.

## **Goal 3: Micro-Credential Program**

### Strategy:

- Meet with our continuing education office to explore the badging program for marketable skill building and developing substantive expertise.

## **Goal 4: Develop Skilled Faculty**

### Strategy:

- Establish an engaged researcher faculty fellows program consisting of a 1-year commitment that includes training, relationship development, and project development, all supported through full course release for the year. The goal is five fellows per year.
- Partner with the Scholars Strategy Network to conduct media and policy engagement training.
- Utilize engaged scholar-visiting faculty as mentors to downtown campus faculty.
- Design in-person training on engaged research and relationship development is open for all faculty and offered twice per year.
- Establish a peer review team for grant proposals that include a community engagement component or methodology.

## **Goal 5: Support Tenure-Track Faculty**

### Strategy:

- Establish a multi-disciplinary list of senior scholars external to our institution as a suggested list of external reviewers for promotion and tenure processes.
- Develop template language that defines community-engaged research for tenure and promotion packets.
- Engaged research leaders visit unit faculty meetings to promote engaged research activities.

## **Goal 6: Recognize and Reward High-Performing Faculty**

### Strategy:

- Establish a social impact award for three faculty members per year, specifically for faculty at our downtown campus.
- Consistently award community-engaged research grants.

## **Goal 7: Maintain a Team Leveraged Across the University**

### Strategy:

- Hire a fully funded director for engaged scholarship.
- Hire/designate an IRB official who specializes in community-engaged scholarship.

- Designate an Office of Research official based on the downtown campus to address faculty and community research administration needs.
- Establish an Ombudsman for Engaged Research position.
- Strategically expand visiting faculty of engaged scholarship.
- Establish an alumni chapter/advisory board for the downtown campus.

Obviously, some of these strategies are more ambitious than others, but we believe these seven goals help us establish guardrails to develop a clearer focus on community-engaged scholarship and, more importantly, will help us reignite and transform our mission as an urban metropolitan campus.

This study was valuable and revealed several key next steps for our metropolitan campus. Yet, more emphasis on the voices of community members warrants future study. In this study, six different communities or communities representing voices were contacted. One area the authors would like to explore is a separate study of community members with minimal or no connection to the university. This would allow for greater representation of our immediate geographic area and position us well for future partnerships.

## Conclusion

This study was a motivating experience for the authors, all of whom are either full-time tenure track faculty members at the downtown campus or are graduate teaching assistants primarily located downtown. Despite these different professional labels, the core uniting factor for these authors was the determination of a new path forward for the downtown campus to engage in true community-engaged scholarship. However, more is needed to assume that just the voices represented in the author list will suffice when developing a strategic plan. Instead, collaborative stakeholder engagement, both internal (inside the institution) and external (community members), is necessary to determine new levels of insight. Furthermore, encouraging buy-in from senior administrators will also allow for potential future success (Cunningham, 2024).

Guarasci (2019) said:

As stakeholders in urban and metropolitan colleges and universities, we can let the market model work its internal logic and redesign higher education around a purely commercial philosophy or we can assert our agency in reinventing higher learning so that it is robust, affordable, and engaging. Either our absence or resilient creativity will spell the outcome. (p. 36)

This quote illustrates our primary objective. Through our strategic plan, we want to enhance our resilient creativity to engage our community partners. We recognize that without a proactive approach, the tendency will be for an entire campus to fall into bad habits organically. We believe establishing this new strategic plan and focusing our resources on the objectives

mentioned here will help us move forward.

The approach here to collaboratively engage stakeholders in our strategic planning process while using the SWOT technique to establish questions created a framework that was easily digestible and lent itself to useful categorizations of participant responses. We also believe our process is replicable for others in a comparable situation. Furthermore, using the six categories of community engagement as identified by Gordon da Cruz (2018) allowed us to stay true to the spirit of CES without relying too much on our assumptions as to what constitutes effective community-engaged scholarship or even our own understanding of how to create structures to encourage CES partnerships.

Our strategic objectives connect in many ways to these six categories: we need to consider who establishes community issues and what stakeholders are involved in CES, we must continue to reward the scholarly investigation of public issues, institutions can thrive when there are collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships and collaborative knowledge production, and finally, we should strategically utilize our institutional resources for the public good while simultaneously supporting faculty scholarship. The strategic goals we outline here support this overall vision of CES and will help us move from being tactical to transformational while reclaiming the purpose of our metropolitan campus.

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