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Alignment Between Individual and Institutional Identities and Values

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Faculty Community-Engaged Scholars Choosing to Come and Stay

Alignment Between Individual and Institutional Identities and Values

Elaine Ward, Emily Janke, Erica Wrencher, Hillary Goodner, Tania Mitchell, and Michael Hemphill

Abstract

As institutions seek to recruit and retain diverse community-engaged scholars, it is important to understand the experiences of faculty who choose to work at their new institution and whether those experiences align with their initial perceptions about institutional commitments to and support for community-engaged scholarly work. Do institutional signals that express support for community-engaged scholarship influence faculty members' choice to work at an institution? Once recruited, how do faculty experiences align with their initial expectations for community-engaged scholarship? This study examines 21 faculty members' experiences at a single minority-serving university (MSI) to understand their sense of alignment and the intersections between individual faculty and institutional commitments to equity-centered community engagement. Institutions that highly regard and reward faculty community-engaged scholars provide conditions that foster full participation of faculty, students, and communities allowing them to flourish.

Keywords: *community-engaged scholarship, equity, faculty recruitment and retention*

Elegir venir y quedarse para académicos comprometidos con la vinculación

Alineación entre individuos e identidades y valores institucionales

Elaine Ward, Emily Janke, Erica Wrencher, Hillary Goodner, Tania Mitchell y Michael Hemphill

Resumen

A medida que las instituciones de educación superior buscan reclutar y retener a diversos académicos comprometidos con la comunidad, es importante comprender las experiencias de los profesores que eligen trabajar en una institución nueva y si esas experiencias se alinean con sus percepciones iniciales sobre los compromisos institucionales y el apoyo al trabajo de los académicos comprometidos con la comunidad. ¿De qué manera influyen las señales institucionales que apoyan el trabajo comunitario de sus docentes en la decisión de elegir trabajar en una institución? Una vez reclutados, ¿cómo se alinean las experiencias de los profesores con sus expectativas iniciales de su rol como académicos vinculados al trabajo comunitario? Este estudio examina las experiencias de 21 profesores en una universidad al servicio de una sola minoría (MSI) para comprender su sentido de alineación y las intersecciones entre los individuos y los compromisos institucionales con la vinculación comunitaria basada en la equidad. Las instituciones que valoran y recompensan a los académicos comprometidos con la vinculación comunitaria, brindan condiciones para que prosperen y además fomentan la plena participación de los docentes, estudiantes y las comunidades.

Palabras clave: *Trabajo académico en vinculación comunitaria, equidad, reclutamiento y retención docente*

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Much has been written about the experiences of community-engaged scholars and the challenges they face within their institutions and disciplines. Few studies examine faculty recruitment and retention. This study was motivated by the practical interest to recruit and retain community-engaged faculty as a strategy to enact, deepen, and sustain one institution's commitment to community engagement. Knowing how a prospective faculty member perceives the institution as community-engaged before they are hired and how their experience aligns with their initial perception once employed, can help us understand whether University's efforts to demonstrate its identity as a community-engaged campus are effective. This study conceives of recruitment as the faculty member choosing to "enter employment" at the institution and conceives of retention as whether they decide to "stay or leave." Shifting recruitment and retention more toward *faculty choice* centers the agency and experience of the individual faculty member and helps the institution understand if their engagement efforts are perceived and experienced by faculty members in the ways the institution intends.

Many institutional efforts to support community-engaged scholars are aimed at either a) helping interested faculty to develop their own scholarly agendas and partnerships with communities—for example, through professional development, internal funding, and supports that help faculty build their capacity as scholars, or b) by educating and encouraging academic peers to fairly and equitably value community-engaged scholarship. Institutional champions of community engagement try to change the minds of those who are resistant to make room for those who want to be community-engaged scholars. Our study suggests that there are additional considerations for institutions to help deepen their community-engaged commitments. Specifically, our study finds that community-engaged scholars are deeply engaged for personal reasons, often grounded in their social identities and commitments to the interrelated values of equity and success for traditionally underserved students. Therefore, institutions—especially minority-serving institutions like the University of North Carolina, Greensboro (UNCG)—can mobilize these interconnections and build institutional infrastructures and cultures that support community engagement (Sturm et al., 2011; Ward, 2010) while simultaneously enabling diverse community-engaged faculty to flourish in ways that validate individual identities, attributes, and commitments (Sturm et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005).

Community engagement has become a strategy used by leaders of institutions of higher education to develop a distinctive organizational image and identity, to increase student enrollment, and to diversify faculty. In the last few years, there have been renewed calls to center equity in our understanding and articulations of community engagement (Mitchell & Chavous, 2021; Morales, 2020; Santana et al., 2023). As a high-impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008), community-engaged and other forms of active learning are seen as commitments that bolster student engagement and retention (Salvador, 2017) and deepen equity, inclusion, and student success on our campuses, in our classrooms, and with communities (Evans et al., 2009; Santana et al., 2023; Sturm et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005). Such commitments are important generally and are particularly significant now, considering the pending "enrollment cliff," and the demographic downward trend of graduating high school seniors who are the predominant population pipeline for college and University enrollment (Boecknerstedt, 2022).

Institutions designated as minority-serving and situated within racially diverse communities carry a particular responsibility to these intersecting commitments in ways that can level power hierarchies and open higher education up to truly equitable and inclusive community engagement practices (Ward & Lortan, 2021). Centering equity and anti-racism in our community engagement work requires us to shift the teaching, research, and learning paradigm from a focus on deficits toward recognizing, valuing, and rewarding the cultural wealth of students, community members (Evans et al., 2009; Yosso, 2005; Mitchell & Chavous, 2021), and the assets of community-engaged faculty (O'Meara, 2015; Ward, 2010).

As a form of scholarship that is overrepresented by women and faculty of color (Antonio, 2002; Antonio et al., 2000; Baez, 2000; Turner et al., 2008; Vogelgesang et al., 2010; Ward, 2010), community-engaged scholarship and the collaboration among faculty, students, and community through mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnerships should no longer be considered in isolation from institutional diversity, equity, inclusion and student success efforts (Eatman, 2012; Furco et al., 2022; Sturm et al., 2011). Prior to, but especially since 2020, faculty recruitment has tended to focus on diversifying the faculty and staff as ways

to address racism and social justice (Kezar et al., 2021; Fries-Britt et al., 2011). Key to attracting and recruiting diverse faculty is understanding influencing factors for community-engaged faculty (Morrison & Wagner, 2016) and the development of institutional programs, structures, and cultures that align with their personal and professional identities, aims, and values.

Post and colleagues (2016) note a broadening of scholarship within higher education to include community-engaged scholarship. Concurrently, this expansion reflects the commitments of a new, more diverse generation of faculty that aims to engage in scholarship that matters on deeply personal levels and advances equity, inclusion, and justice. For many community-engaged scholars in general and the participants in this study in particular, community engagement is rooted in their identity and commitments to the values of inclusion and justice. This is tied to one's purpose for becoming a scholar, where community engagement is "not only a theory of practice, but also a way of life, a way of being or existing" (Ward, 2010), or what Plaxton-Moore calls "embodied praxis" (2021). Evans et al. (2009) describe community-engaged scholarship from their perspectives as "African Americans in our community life as well as in our life as civic engagement professionals" (p. 13). These engaged faculty argue for the "centrality of race" that "can deepen the understanding of what it means to serve, work, experience, and educate" as community-engaged scholars and—along with a focus on gender, class, and cultural identity—"can broaden contemporary debates of how [community-engaged scholarship] is defined and practiced" (*ibid.*).

Additionally, community engagement is tied to one's understanding of how knowledge is stewarded, generated, and shared. It is deeply rooted in our individual identities as well as our relationships with communities (Vogelgesang et al., 2010; Ward, 2010), all the while acknowledging the assets and cultural wealth of those communities (Yosso, 2005). Faculty seeking to influence social change are likely to pursue community engagement opportunities in their academic careers. Yet, at times, community-engaged faculty can experience marginalization within traditional academic culture (Baez, 2000; Bellas & Toutkoushian, 1999; Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2020; Ellison & Eatman, 2008; O'Meara, 2002; Sax et al., 1996). This study centers the experiences of community-engaged faculty in their commitments to "conduct research, teach and develop [institutions] that serve a larger purpose of struggling toward social and racial justice" (Yosso, 2005, p. 82).

Many colleges and universities have sought to institutionalize support for community engagement through public statements, programs to support professional and partnership development, tracking and assessing partner processes and outcomes, and alignment with core academic and institutional priorities (Driscoll & Sandmann, 2016). There are approximately 350 U.S. institutions recognized for their institutionalization of community engagement through the Carnegie Elective Community Engagement Classification designation (American Council on Education, 2022). These institutions have embedded community engagement deeply within programs and units. Pervasive engagement, integrated into core institutional priorities and initiatives, positively transforms the culture of the institution and, thereby, the experiences of faculty and students who engage with communities (Eckel et al., 1998; Saltmarsh et al., 2015).

Yet, even if the institution is classified as community-engaged, the experiences of individual scholars can vary greatly due to the unique contexts, norms, and cultures of different departments and disciplines. So, while institutions may actively seek recognition and reputation as community-engaged to recruit more and diverse faculty, once a person transitions from preemployment to actual employment, their sense of personal and professional alignment to the institution may change. Faculty come to understand the institutional culture from the perspective of an insider (Schein, 1985) when they encounter programs, policies, reward structures, communications, and other artifacts of the institution. Unwritten norms and espoused values also greatly influence the faculty member's experience. This case study explores faculty members' individual characteristics that influence them as community-engaged scholars, their choice to join a community-engaged institution, how their subsequent experiences once employed at the institution align with or diverge from their initial perceptions, and ultimately influence their choice to stay working at the University.

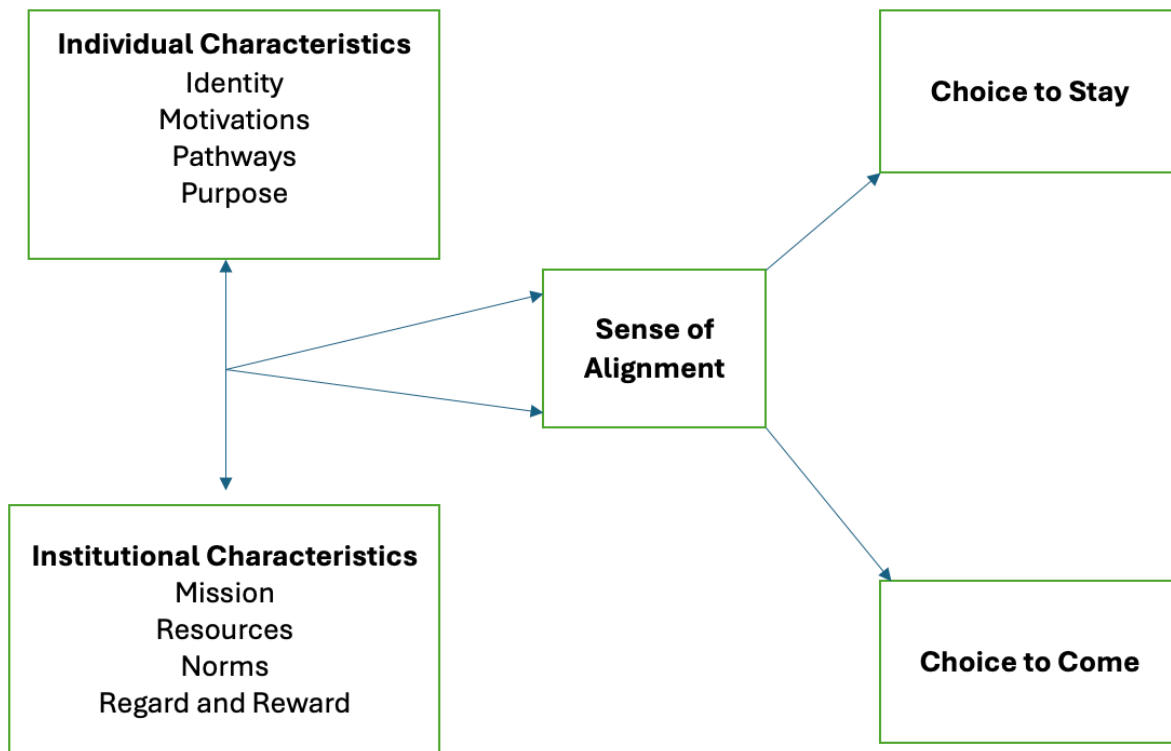
Conceptual Framework

The desire to develop and sustain community-engaged scholarship is motivated by both individual and institutional characteristics (Colbeck & Wharton-Michael, 2006; O'Meara, 2010; Wade & Demb, 2009; Ward, 2010). Individual characteristics may include identity, gender, race/ethnicity, pathways into the work, experiences and purpose, academic discipline, teaching and service loads, research expectations, and epistemology. Institutional characteristics may include mission, resources, norms, and evaluation policies and practices. Colbeck and Wharton-Michael (2006) suggest that, together, individual and institutional characteristics can shape faculty members' goals, as well as beliefs about what they can do personally, and what can be done at the institution in general. (See also Ward, 2010.)

Faculty develop a sense of whether they—as an individual and engaged scholar—will “fit” within the institution they joined. Faculty may reflect on questions like “Will I be recognized and rewarded for the work I seek to contribute?” One's sense of alignment or fit is developed through interpretations of an institution based on artifacts, espoused values, and assumptions (Eckel et al., 1998). Prior to choosing to join the institution, faculty will form judgments about alignment broadly based on information they can collect, such as public statements, policies, websites, accreditations, and informal and formal interviews. Once employed, faculty will acquire more and new information as they experience how policies are applied, how espoused values are followed, and how the unwritten norms and assumptions of different groups within the institution are acted upon. Now, as a member of the institution, the faculty member develops a deeper understanding of the institution's identity and, in turn, may be better able to navigate the policies and practices that are in place. Taken together, this literature (Colbeck & Wharton-Michael, 2006; Eckel et al., 1998; O'Meara, 2010; Wade & Demb, 2009; Ward, 2010) informs the conceptual framework developed to help explore how the faculty member perceptions of institutional characteristics, via espoused values and artifacts, align and motivate them to choose to apply to work there (choice to come) as well as how their experiences once employed affect their choice to stay (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Conceptual Framework



Adapted from Colbeck & Wharton-Michael, 2006; Eckel et al., 1998; Ward, 2010

Methodology

This is a qualitative case study informed by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which “places the person at the heart” of research endeavors (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 204), seeking a first-person perspective. As such, IPA is focused on an individual and “the sense they make of their experience” to understand how phenomena are understood through their retelling of the “texture and qualities” of their engagement with the identified phenomena (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 194). Interviews were conducted to understand the individual and institutional factors shaping the experiences of community-engaged faculty at a university. The research proposal was reviewed and approved by the UNCG’s Institutional Review Board.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study sought to understand how faculty make sense of their community-engaged identities in relation to the institution’s context and culture. Specifically, we sought to understand faculty members’ motivations for community-engaged scholarship, decisions to join a community-engaged institution, and their experiences of mis/alignment with institutional policies and practices designed to support community-engaged scholarship.

The conceptual framework guided the development of the interview protocol (see Appendix). The interview protocol asked 19 questions about personal characteristics, institutional characteristics, sense of alignment between self and institution, and choices about coming to work at the university and deciding to stay. For example, questions were asked about the faculty member’s career path, personal background, social identities, and motivations for becoming a community-engaged scholar. Another set of questions was

asked about the faculty member's experience of UNCG as an institution, specifically to share about their experiences within their department with peer and annual reviews related to community engagement work.

Institutional Context: University of North Carolina at Greensboro

UNCG is a four-year, public research institution, founded in 1891 as a women's college. UNCG is one of a 17-institution state system and enrolls approximately 17,500 students, of which about 14,000 are undergraduates and 51% identify as first-generation college students. Since 2015, UNCG has been led by Chancellor Franklin D. Gilliam, who is the first Black chancellor to lead a public University in North Carolina that is not a historically Black institution. Dr. Gilliam's scholarship focuses on African American politics, and he has emphasized civic engagement in previous administrative roles at the University of California, Los Angeles. Under Gilliam's leadership, UNCG has been recognized for its commitment to addressing racial equity in student success and increased hiring of traditionally underrepresented faculty and staff (Brown, 2021). UNCG is one of the most diverse institutions in North Carolina. In fall 2015, the University became federally recognized as a minority-serving institution (MSI) and Title III University, and in 2023 as an "emerging" Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). In 2021, more than half of UNCG students identify as people of color, and nearly half are Pell Grant eligible (UNCG at a Glance, 2021). Faculty appointments are split almost evenly between academic professionals (fixed-term contracts) and tenure-track faculty.

In addition to holding the Carnegie Foundation's Elective Classification for Community Engagement since 2008, UNCG incorporated recognition of community-engaged scholarship in promotion and tenure policies in 2010 (Janke et al., 2022a; Janke et al., 2022b) and continues to publicly communicate its commitment to and activity toward community engagement through its websites, magazines, and Collaboratory (an online database of community engagement and public scholarship activities and partnerships) (Janke, Medlin et al., 2021). "Community engagement" is also identified as one of four institutional strategic priorities.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

It is important to consider the broader societal context and climate influencing participants and institutional structures during the research. Interviews for this study occurred in winter/spring 2022 as the institution was continuing to experience challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, social and racial reckoning, declining student enrollments, reduced state appropriations, economic recession, and increased mental health concerns for students, faculty, and staff. The work and community collaborations of scholars were upended. In recognition of the immense impact on work, all faculty were invited to write COVID-19 context statements (Janke, Morrison et al., 2021) in their faculty annual reports or pause their "tenure clock" for those on the tenure track. In response to budget cuts associated with enrollment declines, all professional academic track faculty contracts were reduced from multiyear to single year. These are important contextual considerations for this study's findings and our analysis.

Data Sources and Collection

Our research employed a purposeful sample of faculty that sought to maximize intensity (i.e., information richness) and variation (i.e., diversity in social identity, department, and position) (Patton, 2002). A recruitment email was sent to all full-time faculty members hired in the past six years. The list of faculty was provided by the Provost's office and included 429 faculty across ranks, including tenure and non-tenure track. The invitation asked if the individual identified as a "community-engaged scholar," providing the following definition: "Community engagement is defined as the collaboration between faculty and the larger community for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (adapted from the Carnegie Foundation).

Seventy-nine faculty responded to the initial recruitment email and twenty-one consented to participate in an hour-long interview (see Appendix for interview protocol) giving us our sample. Each researcher interviewed three to five participants over Zoom. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Participants represented 17 departments in six units (i.e., school or college) and included tenure track (14) and non-tenure or academic professional track (7). Fifteen were assistant rank, three were associate rank, and three were academic professionals without rank. Thirteen participants identified as women, and eight identified as men. Racially, four participants identified as Black, three as Asian, one as Latinx, and 13 as white. Time employed at UNCG ranged from one to six years. Data are anonymized and pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the faculty members.

Research Team

The research team included two doctoral students and four faculty members—two from UNCG and two from other institutions. All identify as community-engaged scholars. One researcher is male and five identify as female; three are researchers of color, two are graduate students (one from UNCG and one from another institution), three are full professors, and one is an associate professor. Two faculty members are academic administrators. Affiliated academic departments include Education; Peace and Conflict Studies; Kinesiology; and Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development. This was the first time this research team collaborated on a project. The research team had access to the University through the UNCG Institute for Community and Economic Engagement. Our positionalities as internal or external researchers may have affected participants during the interviews. As researchers, we shared our researcher positionalities with our participants at the outset of the interviews.

Analysis Plan and Approach

The conceptual framework guided our initial analysis through the identification of emergent themes and initial codes. As a research team, we used the “dialogal approach” for our analysis, which “places a particular emphasis on fostering dialogue *between* researchers in order to deepen understanding of a phenomenon” (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 203). The double hermeneutic common to IPA involves interpretation of the participants’ meaning making of their experience as well as “that of the researcher during the stages of analysis” (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 198). Our procedures for analysis seek to uncover the meanings faculty are making of their community engagement experiences individually and then to identify connections and qualities shared across the faculty and institutional experiences to develop a more textured understanding of the climate for community-engaged scholarship and the experiences of self-identified community-engaged scholars at the University. The research team met regularly for one and a half hour meetings over Zoom to analyze and arrive at a collaborative understanding of the data. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis and coding were supported by NVivo software (Lumivero, 2023).

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

This study is limited in that it is a single institutional case study. The study only includes current UNCG faculty, so we do not know about the experiences of community-engaged faculty who left the institution. This perspective would be helpful to understand. Members of the research team include faculty and staff who currently work at the University; their positionality may have influenced responses given from study participants. The study examines only one aspect of a faculty member’s decision to work at an institution—community engagement—while there are many factors that influence job decision-making, including higher education market forces. The broad nature of labor market pressures and an exploration of other individual factors were beyond the scope of this study. The study did not track perspectives in real time, so retrospective reflections on prior perceptions could be biased. Additionally, the interviews took place in the winter and spring of 2022 when faculty were experiencing challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic,

therefore, the timing may skew responses related to expectations for teaching, research, and connection with the community during this period.

Findings

Three aspects of the conceptual framework emerged as most integral in our findings, including 1) the individual motivations for community engagement; 2) the sense of an institutional alignment shaped prior to employment; and 3) the sense of alignment between individual and institutional characteristics (re)shaped during employment. We present findings from the data in these three areas prior to our discussion of the findings.

Individual Characteristics of Motivations for Community Engagement

Faculty responded to questions designed to elicit understandings about their personal pathways to and motivations for community engagement. For example, we asked what do they attribute as reasons for their community-engaged scholarship, and how do their social identities influence their work? Participants most directly/strongly linked their childhood experiences ($n = 4$), family values ($n = 9$), and their race/ethnicity ($n = 8$) as motivating reasons for pursuing community-engaged scholarship. Others pointed to their faith ($n = 2$), becoming a parent ($n = 2$), and where they lived ($n = 6$) as shaping their motivations for community engagement. Participants' individual characteristics of identity, motivations, pathways, and purpose intersect and shape their positionalities and pathways into this work.

Early Childhood Experiences, Family Values, and Place

Faculty members' early childhood experiences and imparted family values were meaningful influences on their commitments to community engagement. Influences included their parents' activism, as described by Laura:

I have a history of activism that I directly traced to my mom. My mom marched with Cesar Chavez in the 60s and 70s. She instilled in me and role modeled to me protests and demonstrations and the importance of voting . . . from a very young age.

Similarly, Lisa's father worked with communities around the world, and over the course of the interview, she began to understand his work as similar to her own community-engaged work: "I didn't necessarily realize [this] until I was talking with you." Other participants linked family values to community engagement. For example, from protesting with parents to being exposed to theater, Ali's upbringing offered "space that allowed us to express discontent and what we wanted from the world. And also, a place to teach people, to educate people about the African American experience."

Others spoke about the conditions related to race/ethnicity and where they grew up as motivating their pursuit of a career. For example, Cheryl shared, "there were always lots of disparities (that were) health related, and just social issues coming from a rural county where there's a great deal of Blacks in the county. There's still this power balance—and there's an imbalance of resources. So that has always fueled me to kind of want to explore why that exists and what we can do to reduce those, uh, those disparities." John shared of his experience growing up in a place where immigration of Spanish speakers was prevalent: "I really wanted to become an interpreter to help people, and I realized that there was a need in the community for people who are fluent in into languages and who can help people get access to healthcare and services in the community." Others spoke of faith, as Emma shared, "I'm a Christian, so, a lot of my beliefs kind of shape the fact that we're called to love on other people."

Participants shared how this sense of solidarity *with* others led them to value relationships and partnerships, and that these family values directly influenced their community-engaged scholarly identity. Others, like Brian and Nick, spoke about place and the significance of growing up in a multiracial community and how having access to resources, such as the public library, was important to their early understanding of the importance of community. Brian shared that his interest in critical perspectives and

feminist perspectives was informed by his experience growing up in a “multiracial community . . . [and the need to be] aware of different things going on in the community, aside from my own ethnolinguistic group. I think also as a child kind of figuring out our interactions with white supremacy and racism and trying to figure out answers to that.” Nick credited his interest in public libraries to his experience growing up in a small rural town with access to few resources: “I’ve always seen public libraries and the practice of public librarianship as a window, I mean, a place for connections that otherwise don’t exist.”

Sense of Individual Alignment to Institution Shaped Prior to Employment

The authors wanted to understand if faculty members thought about how the University would value and support their community engagement work prior to becoming employees. Specifically, did any of the University’s public messaging as a community-engaged institution factor into why the faculty chose to pursue and accept employment at UNCG? We found that faculty members tended to know that UNCG was heavily engaged with its local community and that was attractive to them as prospective employees. Specifically, participants spoke about the University’s connections to and care for the surrounding community ($n = 8$), its “status,” “focus,” or “classification” as a community engagement institution ($n = 6$), institutional efforts to support diversity and inclusion ($n = 6$), and its recognition of community engagement in promotion and tenure policies ($n = 3$).

University External Messaging Regarding the University’s Commitment to Community

Faculty tended to know UNCG to be a community-engaged institution by various artifacts, including websites, policies, examples of scholars doing the work, or the status as a recipient of the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement. For Laura, community engagement was a distinctive feature: “I applied to a lot [of institutions] and this was the only one that mentioned [community engagement].” Reading more on the website was “really exciting” for Laura; in her interview, she recalled thinking “those are exactly my values. I was seeing my values in the website [and] in the conversations I was having.” Similarly, for Francis, seeing community engagement work valued on the website was an attractor: “when thinking about accepting the position at UNCG . . . there was already really wonderful stuff happening and I wanted to contribute to it.” Nick shared that he “really was impressed by . . . the classification from the Carnegie [Foundation] as a community-engaged campus.” He went on to recount his thoughts when choosing UNCG:

With this focus on community engagement (at UNCG) I felt like there was an opportunity to really do the research that I wanted to do, and not the way my PhD advisor and my committee wanted. . . . So, it just felt like there was a space to really experiment and to really craft something that seemed authentic to my interest and goals. I don’t know, but I think it’s possible if I didn’t feel like I could do that, I may not have become a faculty member.

Denise shared how seeing community engagement in the job advertisement was important to her because it signaled that her scholarship would be valued: “[it] looks like I can actually do some work and get recognized in it--and not just be seen as something that’s separate from my scholarly work.” What UNCG conveyed publicly on the website and in the job advertisements communicated that the institution valued community engagement in ways that helped the faculty member choose to work there. That faculty could imagine their community-engaged scholarly work being respected and valued brought a sense of alignment between their identity as a community-engaged scholar and UNCG as a community-engaged institution that valued such work.

The Faculty also understood the university to be inclusive, particularly with regard to race/ethnicity. Ashley was attracted by the presence of other faculty of color, the inclusion of low-income, first-generation students, and the apparent inclusion of community-engaged scholarship as an aspect of faculty work. In referring to the need to embrace diverse faculty and students, she believed that UNCG has shown “the demonstrative action that said we see it, and we’ve done something about it.” She believed that UNCG was

“walking the walk,” as she termed it, sharing that UNCG has “the most first-generation college students of all of the UNC system” and that it is “federally marked as a minority serving institution.”

In thinking about his choice to join UNCG, Mark shared that he found “social justice and community engaged work (were) really highlighted as core tenants of the department . . . that was really highlighted.” He went on to share his belief of the department “valuing different ways of generating knowledge. . . The emphasis of value on engaging students in your research, engaging community members in your research, things like that.”

Support Structures for Community-Engaged Scholarship

Availability of funding and other structural supports were important to the participants in their choice to work at UNCG. Several participants named internal funding awards dedicated to supporting community-engaged scholarship as important indicators of the support that would be available to them once hired. Denise noted how UNCG “made sure that there were these dollars for people to do . . . research in the community . . . So it was a very strong selling point. I feel they truly meant that they wanted to have faculty members [working with communities].” Ben noted how “there was a stronger infrastructure for the type of research that I wanted to do at UNCG.” This was a meaningful indicator of available support and influential in his decision-making. Nick imagined his future community-engaged scholarship very specifically; he knew that he “wanted to work with public libraries . . . And . . . the opportunity to come to UNCG . . . with this focus on community engagement—I felt like there was an opportunity to really do research I wanted to do—engaged research.” Faculty did not always see these kinds of opportunities to pursue community-engaged scholarship available at other institutions and the alignment they felt between their own values and commitments and those espoused by UNCG motivated faculty in their choice to come and work at the University and in Greensboro.

Sense of Individual Alignment to Institution (Re)Shaped Once Employed

Once employed at UNCG, some faculty members’ actual experiences of how their community-engaged scholarship was valued and supported (or not) departed from their initial expectations. Participants were divided in their perception of their community-engaged work as valued ($n = 11$) or not valued ($n = 10$). As evidence of the institution’s level of support for community-engaged scholarship, participants pointed to institutional and departmental communications and messages, especially about the value of funded research ($n = 14$) and scholarly products that emphasize traditional measures of scholarship, namely externally funded research and peer-reviewed articles or books ($n = 5$). Unforeseen and current contextual factors (e.g., budget shortfalls) weighed heavily for faculty members when describing whether they felt a sense of alignment between their community-engaged scholarly commitments and the University’s ($n = 8$).

Alignment

Brian continued to experience alignment between his perceptions of supports available prior to employment and what he experienced once hired, noting that he experienced support at the department and institutional levels:

All the smaller pieces of infrastructure I didn’t see until I got to the position . . . I’m seeing it a lot now . . . in my day-to-day interactions with my colleagues in my department, what I see in my academic unit, and at the school . . . level. . . . I was seeing the other offices that are doing real authentic community partnerships. That is the kind of work that I’m not only surrounded by, but that I embrace. . . . I started to get the sense that this is where I really feel empowered by the community-engaged scholarship that’s here.

Echoing Brian, John shared, “I feel like my department values are very rooted in service.” While research shows that the broader institutional context matters in terms of the levels and types of community engagement faculty members do (O’Meara, 2012; Ward, 2010), this study finds that faculty experiences in

their academic departments contribute significantly to whether they perceive their work to be valued by the institution. Similar to Brian, John shared, “I feel like my department values are very rooted in service.” When a faculty member experiences their community engagement work being valued by their department, this alignment between their personal and professional values and their commitment to their community engagement work is bolstered and sustained (Ward, 2010). Institutions, especially at the departmental level, can pay attention to how they indicate support for community engagement work, for example, what policies exist or what language is used to communicate about community engagement, and what other evidence there is for how community engagement work is valued and rewarded.

For some faculty members, alignment was strengthened when they continued to experience institutional support. Leslie deemed her meeting with the director of the Institute for Community and Economic Engagement and the Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement during her job interview as “terrific” and felt “from the get-go that UNCG was very supportive” of her community-engaged scholarship. Funding was seen as a meaningful demonstration of institutional commitment that helped faculty feel like their community-engaged scholarship was valued. One faculty member identified the internal funding for community-engaged scholar teams awarded by the Institute for Community and Economic Engagement as an indicator of institutional investment.

(Re)Shaped Alignments and Unforeseen Institutional Pressures

While the availability of internal funding was positive for the participants, external funding was less accessible. Some faculty members named the inequities in external funding for community-engaged scholarship as it tends to attract fewer dollars than other forms of scholarship. Cheryl described a research “hierarchy” based on funding, which makes her “feel very uncomfortable” because she is not able to bring in “millions of dollars in funding to fund doctoral students.” She concluded, “I don’t know if I feel as valued as those faculty members that can do that. Even though I’m working incredibly hard, I’m kind of still in the shadow.” Similarly, Emma found incongruence between expectations for extramural fund development and the work of community engagement. She noted, “the value for our school of nursing and for our community is getting dollars for research. And while it is valuable to have research about community engagement, it’s really the actions [i.e., direct engagement with the community] that are gonna move community engagement forward.”

Several participants spoke about how recent institutional budget cuts affected academic professional track faculty. Early in the data collection phase of this research, the provost announced that in response to pending institutional budget cuts due to enrollment shortfalls and changing funding models, all academic professional faculty contracts would be converted from multiyear to single-year contracts. The campus was told by leadership that decreased student enrollment was attributed, partially, by lower college-going rates of high school students and lower student return rates following COVID-19. A new funding model imposed by the University of North Carolina System changed how student course hours were reimbursed to campuses by the system, reducing funding for graduate student programs and many disciplinary areas, such as education, arts, and humanities.

Several faculty members drew the connection between the vulnerability of non-tenure-track faculty and community engagement. When hearing about the contract change, Ben shared that he felt his effort to practice community engagement was “diminished.” John raised similar concerns around the impact of the budget cuts on community-engaged scholars’ work, saying, “I don’t feel that there is support for community-engaged scholars’ longer-term contracts on the institutional level, because they’re doing a lot of one-year contracts due to the budget crunch.” Dan discussed the impact of budget cuts on community-engaged scholars in this way:

I think with the budget cuts, people get pushed into a self-preservation mode and that makes us less outward focused and looking at how we can be of service to the community . . . which is sad ’cause that’s when we need each other most.

Budget cuts and the various pressures faculty faced because of these cuts challenged their sense of alignment between their academic work in general and their perceptions of UNCG's commitment to their community engagement work. Non-tenure-track faculty experienced this misalignment more so than their tenured colleagues. Faculty members also acknowledged the unforeseen impact of COVID-19 on their work. One noted how "COVID is something that's out of the control of the university . . . that has been one of the most pressing barriers of what has really stalled, even our, our realities of community-engaged scholarship, because . . . I can't actually contact a community partner, but it changes the way that we can develop relationships." Another faculty member noted how their lack of research completion due to COVID-19 impacted them, where it "feels like I'm not being seen for who I am and my work doesn't always feel super valued. Um, even some of the peer reviewed stuff . . . cuz it's not totally finished yet. There is no credit for it being 'in process' in this COVID moment." For community-engaged faculty, COVID-19 presented an unforeseen barrier at all stages of the research process, from partnership development through publication.

Discussion

In this study, the authors examined what shapes faculty members' scholarly identities in a new academic home, and how do they make sense of their community-engaged identities in relation to the institution's context and culture. Specifically, authors explored how faculty values align with the University's values and how this alignment influences faculty member choices to come and to stay working as a community-engaged scholar at the University.

Analyzed through our conceptual framework, our data show how community-engaged faculty actively seek out indications that the institution will support their engaged scholarship. They are choosing an academic home that will allow them to enact their personal commitments to the community. The data also suggest that faculty cultural norms around the value of certain types of activities, particularly at the department level, affect their choice about staying. Unexpectedly, faculty also spoke about the implications of budget cuts and the shortening of non-tenure-track faculty members' contracts from multiyear to single-year renewals, connecting that change to how the institution values community-engaged scholars and their commitments to communities. These findings are further discussed with regard to faculty choice to come to an institution and their decision to stay.

Choosing to Come

As faculty sought employment at UNCG, they scanned institutional characteristics to determine how their own identity, purposes, and commitments may be supported once employed. In several cases, participants compared UNCG to other institutions they had either attended as a student, worked at, or reviewed during their job search. For many, though not all, the university's commitment to community engagement was a point of institutional distinction that was notable and a meaningful contributor to choosing to come. Evidence of institutional characteristics that demonstrate the University's commitment to community engagement includes the presence of other community-engaged scholars on campus, internal funding, promotion and tenure policy, and Carnegie elective classification status as a community-engaged institution. The presence of other community engagement scholars on campus was not included in our initial conceptual framework regarding institutional characteristics, yet in many instances, faculty seem to believe that the presence of other community-engaged scholars indicates likely support for their own future engaged scholarship. This was particularly important at the interview stage, where faculty were imagining the trajectory of their career at a specific place. Such examples of faculty activity were seen on university or department websites and in candidates' interviews as they heard about or spoke with engaged scholars. Prospective faculty also learn about internal funding and promotion and tenure policies that supported community-engaged scholarship. In this way, there may be a virtuous cycle of the presence of engaged scholars encouraging the presence of future engaged scholars.

Personal Alignment

Our study presents evidence that community-engaged faculty choose employment at institutions that demonstrate high regard and value for their community-engaged scholarship (O'Meara, 2015). Additional 'systems of regard' include promotion and tenure processes and access to funding (O'Meara, 2015). Faculty choice to carry out community-engaged scholarship is personal because their commitments to community engagement emanate from deeply personal reasons—they want to directly impact the real-world issues their scholarship addresses. Personal motivations and commitments to community engagement can come from familial experiences, current connections to cultural identity groups, and experiences growing up (Ward, 2010). UNCG's institutional identity as an MSI and its current leadership's overt commitments to equity and inclusion strengthened alignment between individual and institutional commitments. Like the participants in this study, the strength of institutions can be more fully realized when faculty, communities, and students work together to "serve a larger purpose of struggling toward social and racial justice" (Yosso, 2005).

Choosing to Stay

How a faculty member chooses to spend their time and how they are rewarded for those choices are shaped by the values of an institution (Sturm et al., 2011). Once faculty arrive as a new employee, expectation turns into experience. That is, they move beyond their perceptions of the University's public and social justice mission and its resources to support community-engaged scholarship to encountering various cultural norms and peer evaluations of their work within their departments. Once employed, half of the participants' experiences were affirming of their community-engaged scholarship, leading them to feel the institution's support aligned with their own values and goals. The other half had less positive experiences. These faculty members expressed frustration that community engagement was not supported fully in department-level evaluations. The recent reduction of the non-tenure-track faculty contract to one-year terms sent the message that the University was not committed to engaged faculty members or the communities with whom they partner. While not a focus of this study, the budget cuts came up in our interviews and some faculty members expressed deep disappointment as the cuts did not reflect the messages they received during their recruitment process.

Significance of the Department

Once faculty arrive at campus, broader messages from senior administration and evidence of institutional structures for support for engaged scholarship remain meaningful. But departmental experiences become primary as departments are where faculty more directly, deeply, and routinely negotiate their engaged work. Departments provide the structure that "regularizes human interactions, establishes value hierarchies, steers information flows, frames perception, and channels movement and status within social systems. [The department] creates the social context influencing how people understand themselves, what they perceive, and what they value" (Sturm et al., 2011, p. 5). Both Brian and John shared how their experiences in their departments made them feel truly valued.

Intentional design to create structures and spaces where commitments to community engagement, equity, and student success are connected and built into the core values and practices of the institution increases the potential for faculty, staff, students and community members to flourish (Sturm et al., 2011). Of particular importance in achieving this is for the community-engaged faculty member to experience alignment between the deeper departmental cultural values and the norms (espoused values) that undergird any written institutional policies.

Tenure Track and Academic Professionals and External Pressures

Faculty participants in this study were facing multiple pressures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, racial unrest, and an institutional budget crisis. We must consider how "known circumstances, environmental changes, and or cultural shifts might impact faculty . . . [and] find ways to support faculty through shifting

and ever-changing orientations and motivations” (Richard et al., 2022, p. 18). While the pandemic might have impacted community-engaged faculty in similar ways, limiting their scholarship during the shutdown, the budget crisis impacted study participants differently based on status. While understanding the differences between tenure- and academic-professional-track faculty was not the focus of our study, we intentionally included academic professional faculty because they are often, according to the literature, the scholars who contribute to curricular engagement pedagogy, even more than tenure-track faculty (LaFave et al., 2016). They have heavier teaching loads. They are often the people doing the internships, clinicals, practica, and other pedagogies that are located in and may be working collaboratively with communities.

As faculty articulate their alignment and sense of support for community-engaged scholarship, they are more directly impacted by the immediate crises caused by cuts to the budget and their contracts. The faculty noted that community relationships are built over time and require long-term commitments—work is undermined by one-year contracts. Academic professional faculty are more sensitive to and affected by certain institutional signals and contexts than their colleagues who have the job security of a tenure-track position.

Conclusion

Family values ($n = 9$), race/ethnicity ($n = 8$), place ($n = 6$), and childhood experiences ($n = 4$) were commonly identified by the participants as contributing to their motivations and purpose as community-engaged scholars. Less frequently noted were the participant’s faith identity ($n = 2$) or becoming a parent ($n = 2$). Prior to employment, many faculty members viewed UNCG’s connections and care for the surrounding community as the top factor leading them to seek employment at the University ($n = 8$). Participants also valued UNCG’s status as a Carnegie community-engaged institution ($n = 6$) as well as its efforts to support diversity, equity, and inclusion ($n = 6$). Of less significance was UNCG’s recognition of community engagement in promotion and tenure policies ($n = 3$).

Once employed at the University, just over half of the participants ($n = 11$) experienced community engagement as valued in the ways they had initially perceived prior to employment, and just under half of the participants experienced community engagement as less valued than originally perceived ($n = 10$). The participants reported that they saw evidence of how the University valued community engagement in departmental messaging ($n = 14$). Some participants believed that traditional scholarship, peer-reviewed publications, and securing external grant funding are more highly valued than community-engaged research. External pressures, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and national racial unrest, negatively impacted faculty in a myriad of ways during this study and caused their community-engaged research to stall. Of great significance to many of the faculty, particularly the academic professional faculty, were the budget cuts that resulted in their contracts being decreased from multiyear to one year ($n = 8$).

Findings from this study suggest that institutions should consider how they recruit and retain community-engaged faculty members across a multitude of identities, backgrounds and motivations. Critical to the recruitment and retention of such faculty are the structures and supports that demonstrate how the institution values equity-driven community engagement work. Future research should examine faculty-institution “fit” from the point of view of the institution—how their structures, policies, practices, and value systems support the community-engaged scholars they hire and scholarship they produce.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hi--As you know, we want to learn about your experiences around community engagement at UNCG to improve policy, practice, and scholarship at UNCG and beyond. So I have a few questions to ask.

Column I—Motivation and pre-UNCG

INTERVIEWER: So the first set of questions are centered around your motivation before coming to UNCG.

1. What has been your educational and career path to where you are today as a faculty member? I'd love to know anything about your personal, family, community, or cultural context that feels relevant to your path.
2. Why did you decide to become a faculty member in higher education, and in your field in particular?
3. When did you come to identify as a community-engaged scholar, if that is even an accurate way to describe your scholarly identity? What does this mean to you?
 - a. What does this look like in your practice? Can you describe your threads of community-engaged scholarship, whether it's in your teaching, research or service?
4. In what ways have your social identities shaped/influenced/informed your decision to become a community-engaged scholar in the first place? Describe (probe for social identities if not explicitly given).
5. It is often said that universities are concerned with generating, preserving and disseminating knowledge. What are your thoughts on who generates knowledge, how it is generated, and where and how it's disseminated?
 - a. How does this play out in your work as a faculty member?
6. Thinking back to when you were making the decision to come to UNCG, what was your sense of UNCG and the department—what did UNCG and your department seem to value?
 - a. Describe what kinds of things were important for you in your decision-making process?
7. Was community engagement a part of your consideration? In what ways? If so, what kind of indications did you see that shaped your perceptions of how community-engaged scholarship would be valued as an aspect of faculty work?

Column II—Current Experience

INTERVIEWER: So this next set of questions is centered around your current experience here at UNCG.

8. I want to know more about your perceptions and experiences since you've been at UNCG. Describe the institutional culture here at UNCG. (probe: department, unit, university.)
 - a. What are its values? How do you know these are its values?
9. Have you participated in any programs or received funding for community engagement at UNCG or elsewhere since you've been here? If so, which ones? How have these shaped your experience as a community-engaged scholar?
10. Tell me about your experiences in the department with peer reviews, such as annual review, third-year review, reappointment, promotion, or tenure to date—particularly as it relates to your community engagement scholarly work.

Column III—Meaning-Making

INTERVIEWER: So this next set of questions is trying to get at your meaning-making and connection between your work and your place at UNCG.

11. How has it impacted your practice?

- a. Has your institution's faculty reward policy and practice influenced decisions you make regarding your pedagogical, epistemological, or methodological practices?
- 12. Do you think the institution has lived up to its values related to CE (community engagement)? Why or why not? Examples?
- 13. How has your time at UNCG impacted your identity as a CE scholar?
 - a. What role does your social identity or identities have with regard to your experience as a community-engaged scholar?
- 14. Do you feel like it's been a good fit for you here? Why or why not?
 - a. Probe: department, unit, university level.
 - b. Do you feel that your community engagement has been fairly and appropriately valued? Describe.
 - c. Have you faced any institutional barriers to your work?

Column IV—Suggestions and Decisions

INTERVIEWER: So the last set of questions is looking at your future decision and/or any suggestions you have for UNCG.

- 15. How, if at all, do you want to influence or contribute to UNCG as an engaged scholar?
 - a. What might be some priorities for change in your department, school, and/or university?

Wrap Up

- 16. Is there anything I haven't asked about but should have?
- 17. Is there anything else you would like to add?
- 18. Do you have any suggestions or questions for me?
- 19. Are there other colleagues that you recommend to participate in this study?

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