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## Partnership Representation in Public Communications: An Analysis of Community-Engaged Universities' Websites

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PARTNERSHIP REPRESENTATION IN PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS: AN ANALYSIS  
OF COMMUNITY-ENGAGED UNIVERSITIES' WEBSITES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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by  
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## **Abstract**

This study examines the ways in which campus-community partnerships are represented in public communications produced by community-engaged institutions of higher education. Leading scholars of campus-community partnerships and service-learning agree that such relationships should be based on a reciprocal exchange between partners. In public relations endeavors, however, professionals concentrating solely on communicating the university's achievements may overlook the equal contributions of the community partner. This study analyzed website content and universities publications from six colleges nationally recognized for their community-engagement efforts. Using quantitative and qualitative analysis, web content was analyzed for indicators of reciprocity developed from foundational literature regarding campus-community partnerships. Results showed that universities provided limited access on their websites for community partners seeking information about working with the university. Only a small number of university communications outside of the community engagement office provided evidence of mutual benefits (53 percent of articles), transformational partnerships (27 percent of articles), and collaborative language (45 percent of articles); however, community partner identity was included in most communications (64 percent of articles). For all reciprocity indicators, there was a stark difference in how university homepages and university community engagement offices described community engagement. Community engagement websites provided a clear sense of community partner identity and mutual benefits while using collaborative language; however, evidence of transformative partnerships was sparse across all communications. These findings show a great need for improvement in communicating reciprocity. The next step for scholars is to develop a guide to best practices; however, this process must involve community partner input.

# Partnership representation in public communications: An analysis of community-engaged universities' websites

## Introduction

In 1996, Ernest Boyer, then president of the Carnegie Foundation of the Advancement of Teaching, wrote that “after years of explosive growth, American’s colleges and universities are suffering from a decline in public confidence and a nagging feeling that they are no longer at the vital center of the nation’s work” (p. 11). This famous, and prophetic, article marked the onset of a national consciousness about the importance of leveraging university resources “to address our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems” (p. 19). As Boyer said, the very fate of higher education depended on it.

As early as the mid 1800s, community engagement was already embedded into many of America’s universities. The nation’s land grant universities were introduced by the first Morrill Act in 1862, which granted public land to the states to develop institutions of learning which would include among their missions the education of the industrial classes “for the several pursuits and professions of life” (as cited in Comer, Campbell, Edwards, & Hillison, 2006). University outreach continued throughout the 1900s, as university extension programs worked with farmers and their families to improve understanding and accessibility to agriculture techniques (Comer et al., 2006). Campus Compact, a national coalition to support community service in higher education, was founded in 1985, convened initially by the presidents of Brown University, Stanford University, Georgetown University, and the Education Commission of the States (Morton & Troppe, 1996). The coalition was formed largely in response to concern about the moral decline of college students, perceived in the outcomes shown in an annual student study published by Alexander Astin (Morton & Troppe, 1996). The Compact founders believed that if given the opportunity to be involved with service, college students would be active

participants. The publication of Ernest Boyer's call to action in 1996 further increased visibility of integrating service into higher education, and a growing number of universities began to see the value of engaging with their neighborhoods, cities and towns.

The pedagogical approach of service-learning was one way academia responded to this awareness. Service-learning is defined as a "credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996, p. 222). Service-learning is a form of community engagement, which "describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Community Engagement Elective Classification, 2011).

An important component of community engagement is the reciprocal nature of the partnership between university and community; in service-learning, for example, service is performed to benefit the common good while reinforcing student learning on related topics (Jacoby, 1996). In Barbara Jacoby's seminal book *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning*, she delineates how service-learning differs from experiential education such as internships, volunteering, and apprenticeships: "Service-learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (2003, p. 5). The hyphen in service-learning symbolically represents this reciprocity (Eyler and Giles, 1999). Through reflection, students connect their service experiences to content in the classroom.

In a well-designed campus-community partnership, all university and community partners should be viewed as making significant contributions to the partnership's joint outcomes. Universities gain perspective, knowledge and skill through interactions with the community partner. Students involved in service-learning partnerships gain increased understanding of course content and civic awareness. Community partners can benefit from the service being provided, also gaining perspective, knowledge, and skill, but facilitators must be sure the service provided is as beneficial to the community as it is to the university partners.

Few studies to date have centered on public communications regarding campus-community partnerships; public communications have been used in analysis of the differences between "institutional rhetoric" and a university's actual performance in civic engagement initiatives (Holland, 1997); to determine methods through which engaged campuses market themselves using engagement initiatives (Weerts & Hudson, 2009); and to look at patterns of terminology used by institutional leaders to describe engagement initiatives (Doberneck, Glass, & Schweitzer, 2010). Despite the lack of literature, the study of communications and public relations is important for the higher education engagement field, which is continuously striving to develop and sustain meaningful, reciprocal relationships between universities and communities. The complex university setting, in which university public affairs and the community engagement office are housed in separate departments, attests to the importance of examining communications. While community engagement departments may have some influence on communications, most university marketing departments are responsible for creating, maintaining and promoting a school's image (Ancil, 2008).

This study will attempt to determine if content on engaged universities' websites accurately portrays the reciprocal nature of campus-community partnerships.

## **Literature Review**

### **Reciprocity**

One of the most widely accepted definitions of reciprocity comes from sociologist Alvin Gouldner, who describes a universal “norm of reciprocity which requires that 1) people should help those who have helped them, and (2) people should not injure those who have helped them” (1960, p. 162). Social researchers have defined reciprocity as the balance between addressing and receiving behavior in social interactions (Leiva, 2009). Some anthropologists call this balance of exchanges between groups “incorporation” (Bell, 1991; Barth, 1981). At times the definition of reciprocity is limited to the exchange of goods or services, such as the return of commodities comparable in value to the commodities given (Homans, 1974; Kranton, 1996).

Most operational and theoretical definitions of reciprocity infer a sense of mutuality, whether it be between humans, animals, or the exchange of goods. Reciprocity involves the interaction of two or more entities and is considered to be an important component of social interaction. Both modern and historical theories of social exchange assert that reciprocity increases satisfaction in social exchanges and enhances intimacy (de Waal, 2000; Thibaut & Kelley, 1952).

In Social Exchange Theory, relationships are more likely to become close when participants expect the partnership to provide more rewards than costs (Thibaut & Kelley, 1952). People aim to minimize costs and maximize rewards in their personal relationships, and use the balance between the two to evaluate the value of outcomes for different situations. Their subsequent actions are based on these evaluations. Equity theory asserts that even if outcomes are in actuality unequal, a relationship is satisfying as long as each party perceives the outcomes as proportionate to the inputs (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978).



Morton (1997) asserts that close relationships are indicated by interdependency, bi-lateral influence, and consensual decision making, in addition to frequency and diversity of interaction. Walshok (1999) explains that self-disclosure during the early stages of a relationship is essential for a successful partnership. This allows each partner to clarify their expectations for the relationship and express needs and desires.

Several statistical techniques have been used for quantifying reciprocity. The Social Relations Model is used in social psychology and allows researchers to compute dyadic and generalized reciprocity (Kenny & La Voie, 1984; Kenny & Nasby, 1980; Warner, Kenny, & Stoto, 1979). It examines the discrepancy between the behavior each actor addresses to his/her partner and what is received in return. The SRM uses a random effects two-way ANOVA which allows the analysis of the estimations of partner variance, actor variance, and relationship variance.

The directional consistency (DC) index is “a ratio that reflects the degree of symmetry in social interactions” (van Hooff & Wensing, 1987). “The DC is obtained by dividing the number of the total interactions in the most frequent direction ( $H$ ) minus the number of interactions in the less frequent direction ( $L$ ) by the total of interactions performed by all individuals in the group” (Leiva, Solanas, & Salafranca, 2009). The measure will be close to 0 if social relations are symmetrical and near 1 if social relations are asymmetrical. However, the DC is only a global measure and cannot be used for dyadic or individual reciprocity (Leiva, Solanas, & Salafranca, 2009).

### **Reciprocity in Campus-Community Partnerships**

Through analogizing service-learning to close dyadic relationships, Bringle and Hatcher (2002) have identified implications for reciprocal campus-community partnership practice from

theories on close dyadic relationship, such as social exchange theory, equity theory and Morton's charity or social justice model. They translate Walshok's studies on early self disclosure into implication for service-learning practice, suggesting that a "clear sense of identity and purpose (e.g. a mission statement, program priorities, strategic plan, learning objectives)...needs to exist and be effectively communicated to the other party" (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002, p. 507). Based on Morton's characteristics of a close relationship, Bringle and Hatcher recommend service-learning partnerships include a sense of interdependency and involve collaborative decision-making. Additionally, they agree that partnerships should involve bi-lateral influence and mutually beneficial exchange.

Bringle, Clayton and Price assert that a true partnership has three specific qualities: closeness, equity, and integrity (2009). Levels of closeness range from "unaware of the other party" to "transformational," with transformational relationships having high degrees of integrity, equity, and closeness (see Figure 1). Integrity and equity are positively correlated with closeness. According to Berschedi, Syner, & Omoo (1989), closeness is comprised of three components: "frequency of interaction, diversity of interaction, and strength of influence on the

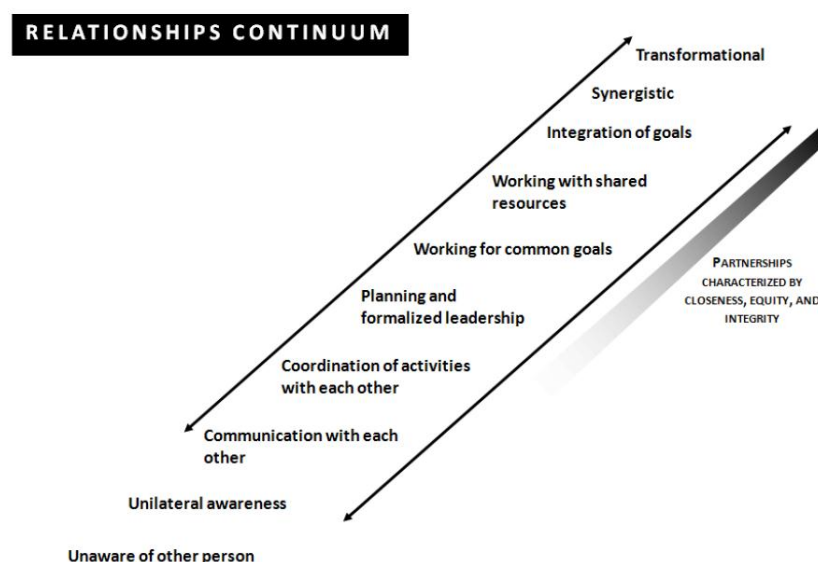


Figure 1. Different types of relationships. The continuum indicates how partnerships move from unawareness to transformational based on characteristics of the relationship. As the partnership nears transformational, the relationship becomes closer with more equity and integrity. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix) from "Partnerships in Service Learning and Civic Engagement," by R. G. Bringle, P. H. Clayton, and M. F. Price, 2009, *Partnerships: A Journal of Service Learning and Engagement*, 1.1, p. 4.

other party's behavior, decisions, plans, and goals" (as cited in Bringle & Hatcher, 2002, p. 508-509). Relationships are closer when partners are involved in diverse interactions, evolve beyond the original project, identify additional projects, and pursue diverse activities (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

The concept of equity elaborates on the ideas of interdependency, bilateral influence and collaborative decision-making, characterizing equitable relationships as evolving from a "tit-for-tat" relationship based on individual gains to consideration of joint outcomes and a communal attitude (Bringle, Officer, Grim, & Hatcher, 2009). Equitable partnerships are those in which both parties view the interactions as fair, even if inputs and outputs are qualitatively and quantitatively unequal. As such, "helping" interactions are inequitable, since one party with resources is helping someone without resources. In this way equality and equity are different, with equity being the preferred aspiration for civic engagement. As opposed to working to and for communities, universities interested in equitable partnerships should be working in and with communities toward mutual goals (Bringle et al., 2009).

Community engagement scholars of late have concerned themselves with how the "technocratic" nature of academia with its "patterns of power" in relationships with others presents serious challenges for community engagement (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). In a technocracy, "the approach to public problems is predominantly shaped by specialized expertise 'applied' externally 'to' or 'on' the community, providing 'solutions' to what has been determined to be the community's 'needs'" (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009, p. 7). This is in contrast to the preferred state of engagement – democracy – which approaches social issues from an assets-based perspective, with all partners sharing authority for knowledge creation. Scholar Patti Clayton speaks to the "power of little words" that indicate the extent of "with-ness"

in partnerships, or the positions of partners as co-educators and co-generators of knowledge (Clayton, 2010).

How universities talk about the work of campus-community engagement (or community-campus engagement, for that matter) can convey the reciprocal nature of a partnership and whether intentionally or not, indicate how the university views its relationship with the community. Using language describing the university doing “to” or “on” the community versus working “with” the community supports the normative state of universities as experts “helping” a needy community. At universities that describe community partners as co-educators and emphasize the importance of shared power, it is important that all external communications support and promote these ideas.

Relationships with the third quality of true partnerships, integrity, consist of “deeply held, internally coherent values; match means and ends; describe a primary way of interpreting and relating to the world; offer a way of defining problems and solutions; and suggest a vision of what a transformed world might look like” (Muthiah & Reeser, 2000).

Relationships based only on exchange characterize what Enos and Morton (2003) have described as a transactional partnership based on each partner focusing on its own short-term gains. This differs from a transformational relationship, a more open-ended relationship in which both parties are open to the partnership’s evolution, continuous assessment of their own identities and vision, and working within a system specifically designed to facilitate the partnership. “In an authentic partnership, the complex dynamics of the relationship mean that the partners face the continuing possibility of being transformed through their relationship with one another in large and small ways” (Enos and Morton, 2003, p. 20). Transactional relationships are acceptable for many service-learning partnerships, especially in the early stages, while partners explore how the

partnership can evolve. Some partnerships also remain at the transactional status because that is what both partners desire.

Clayton and colleagues (2010) introduced the category of exploitive to the relationship types of transactional and transformational, with the understanding that some relationships do not meet the basic standard of mutual benefits. “Exploitive relationships lack closeness, equity, and integrity because they possess unrewarding or harmful outcomes and are not satisfying to one or both persons, even if they are maintained” (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, p. 7, 2010). The Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale (TRES) was developed to measure the extent that a relationship demonstrates characteristics associated with being exploitive, transactional, or transformational (Clayton et al., 2010). TRES was developed from literature describing transformational and transactional relationships (Enos & Morton, 2003) and interpersonal relationships literature as applied to campus-community partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). TRES measures nine key attributes: outcomes, common goals, decision-making, resources, conflict management, identity formation, power, significance, and satisfaction/change for the better. The model classifies relationships into five types: 1) exploitative for one or both; 2 = transactional for one but not the other; 3 = mutually-transactional, with both benefiting; 4 = mutually-transactional and, in addition, transformational for one but not the other; 5 = mutually-transactional and -transformational, with growth for both.

National organizations such as Campus-Community Partnerships for Health and Campus Compact have outlined principles for good partnership practice. Early disclosure and mutual understanding are important components of best practice. At the beginning of a partnership, partners should all agree about the project’s mission, values, goals, and outcomes in addition to the principles and process that the partnership will be follow (Principles, 2006, Torres &

Schaffer, 2000). It is also essential, early on and as the partnership evolves, to identify each partner's needs, strengths, and self-interests to determine how the project can be mutually beneficial for all parties. Partners should strive for clear and open communication before and during the partnerships, providing ample opportunities for feedback and assessment (Principles, 2006, Torres & Schaffer, 2000). Mutual trust, respect and commitment is important to the success of the partnership (Principles, 2006, Torres & Schaffer, 2000). Clear organization and dynamic leadership can assist with communication and with dividing power equally among partners. Lastly, the partnership should allow for changes over time, with the ultimate goal of becoming multidimensional to reflect the true nature of the issues the partnership addresses.

According to Campus Compact's Indicators of an Engaged Campus, community-campus exchange is part of what makes an engaged university (Hollander, Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2001). An engaged institution reserves a place for the community inside the university, not merely acting on its own, but recognizing the community as an equal partner fully entitled to participate in matters that affect both university and community. A university with reciprocal community-campus exchange provides external allocation of resources for community-building efforts and to enhance the joint campus-community experience (Hollander, Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2001). External implies that the funds be allocated to community partners rather than university stakeholders. For true reciprocity, community partners should have a voice in decisions affecting community-based education and initiatives affecting the community. Additionally, universities engaged with communities should provide a forum for public dialogue and encourage collaboration among multiple stakeholders in addressing public issues (Hollander, Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2001).

## **Communicating Reciprocity**

As faculty and administrators introduce the concept of community engagement in America's colleges and universities, there is a necessarily strong and deliberate effort to ensure its reciprocal nature is recognized by all of its stakeholders. Some traditional academics require convincing in order to see the academic nature of community-engaged work (Butin, 2006; Furco, 2001). In some institutions, there is a climate of understanding suggesting academia's advanced knowledge and resources can "save" its uninformed and under-resourced neighbors. This ivory tower elitism fails to recognize the expertise and practical experience that exists outside of the academic understanding.

Institutional community engagement is partially measured by faculty, staff, administration, student, and community awareness of the beneficial aspects of service-learning (Holland, 2001). Community engagement professionals attempt to accomplish awareness through various methods, with some of the more resourced community engagement programs producing their own publicity and maintaining their own websites. Although there is little research on the actual practices of higher education marketing offices, Anctil (2008) describes a marketing office's overall responsibility as understanding the "product," defining the central message, and creating memorable images that an audience can associate with the particular college or university" (p. 90). Most higher education marketing literature describes how marketing offices must communicate "to" members of the institution about what the institutional priorities are, rather than describing a two-way communication style between internal audiences that allow the experts within the academy to collaborate with the marketing office to craft a message that satisfies the needs of both parties. This suggests that, in the case of messages about campus-community partnerships, the community engagement professionals have limited control

over what is conveyed to the public about their work. It is also possible that communication strategies directly conflict with partnership principles, such as when communications are intentionally written to emphasize the importance of a university by portraying it as an expert or redeemer. This can result in incomplete or even insensitive portrayals of campus-community partnerships. These concerns are especially troublesome in the current economic climate, in which universities are increasingly relying on campus-community partnerships to demonstrate to university stakeholders how the university positively impacts its community.

Assuming that a partnership portrayed in a communication is indeed reciprocal, the message that is eventually published could easily neglect this aspect of the story. One reason is the impact of communication networks. Universities are made up of thousands of communication networks – networks in which two people construct their messages based on the context of their particular relationship (Gratz, 1981). When an individual from university public affairs speaks to an academic department's public affairs contact, the understanding between them is based on highlighting the successes of that department, not preserving campus-community partnerships. A message can continue to change as it travels across numerous communication networks before its final destination, taking on new and different meaning each time it is communicated. Even in the event that a community engagement professional has asked the public affairs liaison to ensure that reciprocity is considered in public communications about campus-community partnerships, the various reporters, web designers, photographers, and writers will receive the message through multiple interpretations.

Studies in organizational communication show that universities struggle with communication difficulties in three areas: 1) getting information to the right people at the right time 2) developing accurate information to which people will pay attention, and 3) how the



communication process itself influences the institution (Gratz, 1981). The organizational structure of a university, with its areas, departments, schools, colleges, ancillary units and administration, is complex. Despite efforts to educate the people in charge of public communications about how a message should be communicated, several challenges are present in terms of getting information to the right people at the right time. In some instances, the ‘right person’ may be unknown or may keep changing. Individuals in the public affairs office may be assigned to beats, creating the possibility that, for example, a service-learning partnership in music will be covered by a different writer than a service-learning partnership in science. Additionally, content is often prepared by people in separate departments, with responsibilities such as web copy and photograph selection potentially being farmed out to technology or photography professionals. Because of these factors, the responsibility of capturing the nature of campus-community partnerships is left to individuals unfamiliar with partnership principles. This can result in the inadvertent failure to accurately characterize the important contributions of both partners to the experience. This misrepresentation can have impacts on multiple university stakeholders and be detrimental to the advancement of community engagement on campus as well as damaging to relationships with community partners.

The practice of public relations allows universities to develop mutually beneficial relationships with those on whom the university’s success or failure depends (Smith, 2009). These people, organizations, and entities are called stakeholders or publics, “a group of people that shares a common interest vis-à-vis an organization, recognizes its significance, and sets out to do something about it” (Smith, 2009, p. 48). A university’s success relies on having the resources necessary to achieve its mission, which is largely dependent on stakeholders’ judgment of the universities’ success. University stakeholders include student-based stakeholders, such as

students and student funders; internal stakeholders such as faculty, staff, and trustees; academic, research, and funding bodies; geographical and locality stakeholders; and many others such as taxpayers, government, and national media (Chapleo & Simms, 2010). All stakeholders are important to a university's survival, yet some are particularly critical. Resource dependence theory proposes that an organization will prioritize the stakeholder groups which control resources crucial to the organization's survival (Kreiner & Bhambri, 1988).

Internal stakeholders such as staff and faculty, because of universities' size and structure, often rely on websites for information on issues outside of their specific unit. Content regarding interdisciplinary topics such as service-learning can usually be found in multiple sections of the university website, rather than being limited to just the community engagement office's website. Depending on the predominance of mischaracterizations of service-learning and campus-community partnerships, there is a potential for the development of misconstrued notions among faculty of how these partnerships function. Community engagement professionals at large universities can attest to the difficulty of reaching all faculty who might be attempting or practicing community-engaged pedagogy. The constant influx of new faculty, formation of community associations, and field experience opportunities creates new possibilities every semester for partnerships with the community. Yet, faculty do not always seek out available resources for developing a quality service-learning class or other community-engaged project. In these cases, information encountered on the university website may serve as the only background for developing a community-engaged project. In the least, content misrepresenting campus-community partnerships is a missed opportunity to educate faculty on the mutually-beneficial aspects of community-engaged work; at the worst, the content can perpetuate ivory tower thinking.

Public communications not only affect internal stakeholders; it can have implications for an external audience as well. Public stakeholders, which include governments and public offices, are among the primary groups that control resources for public universities. According to Marginson (2007), stakeholders assess a university's success first through their perceptions of its quality, or how well it performs in the areas of teaching, research and scholarship and knowledge transfer, but also its utility and relevance to their own interests. The fact that utility and relevance is important to stakeholders suggests that successes inside the ivory tower are less important to many stakeholders if these successes do not hold meaning for the communities outside of the walls. Universities' partnerships with non-profit organizations, K-12 schools, and public agencies can demonstrate utility to public stakeholders and show that the university is relevant to the community in which it resides. However, if public communications represent community partners as broken or inferior, the communications do little for promoting the idea of the university as part of its community. Non-reciprocal representations of campus-community partnerships alienate community partners who serve an important role in the educational process. A university that goes out to the neighborhoods to "help" but does not provide its neighbors easy access to university services or portray them as an integral part of the university experience is not engaged with its community.

Bad publicity of campus-community partnerships perpetuates many of the same things that bad service-learning does. In "Why Service-Learning is Bad," John Eby (1998) cautions that "too often service-learning reinforces assumptions of persons who need help that they do not have the resources to solve their own problems. It communicates to communities that they too are deficient and that the answers to the issues they face must come from outside" (p. 4). Non-

reciprocal university communications about campus-community partnerships, even partnerships that are reciprocal, can perpetuate the idea of helpless communities on a mass scale.

Public communications representing community partners as mere recipients of charity and failing to recognize the inherent value of the community partner is damaging to reciprocal community university partnerships, which may erode the progress that has already been made in gaining the trust of stakeholders whom do not always feel connected to or appreciated by the university. There is also a missed opportunity with this content; comprehensive and reciprocal coverage of a campus-community partnership can enhance a successful partnership. Partnerships can suffer if one partner does not know the extent to which they are valued by the other partner (Swann, Hixon & De La Ronda, 1992), which demonstrates the important role that public communications have in campus-community partnerships. Reporting the outcomes to all stakeholders allows the relationship to be “understood, evaluated, and appreciated” (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 509). In fact, partners should seek out mediums in which to affirm the value of the partnership, which includes publicity, shared space, and/or public award (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

## **Research Questions**

Advances in the field of campus-community partnerships ask academia to adopt new ways of thinking about the traditional role of universities. Universities can no longer operate as if all expertise and knowledge lies within the institutional walls; they must accept that there is much to be learned from the community in which it resides. Traditions, habits, and status quo all prove difficult to change, however, and communication strategies are no different.

This study attempts to answer whether engaged universities are communicating the values they espouse. At its most basic, this study attempts to determine if engaged universities publish information about community engagement that demonstrates the concept of reciprocity. Therefore, the primary research question is:

RQ1: Do engaged universities publish information about community engagement that demonstrates reciprocity?

The concept of reciprocity, in terms of community engagement, is comprised of many principles. This study investigates how some of these specific principles are represented in engaged universities' communications. These principles are: community access to university; a clear sense of the community partner's identity; presence of mutually beneficial exchange; transformational relations; and collaborative language (Bringle & Hatcher, 2003; Principles, 2006, Torres & Schaffer, 2000). Therefore, the follow research questions will also be addressed:

RQ2: Do the websites of engaged universities' provide clear and easy access for community partners who are looking for specific program or services?

RQ3: Do the public communications of engaged universities provide a clear sense of community partners' identities and missions?

RQ4: Do the public communications of engaged universities provide evidence of mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge & resources between university and community partners?

RQ5: Do public communications of engaged universities represent community partnerships as transformational?

RQ6. Do public communications of engaged universities use collaborative language to describe campus-community partnerships?

By framing the research questions in this particular way, if a university fails to provide any information about community partnerships, the failure to do so still provides an answer to the questions. This study was focused on communications about campus-community partnerships conducive to including information about community engagement and in particular, indicators of reciprocity; not all public communications were expected to convey reciprocity.

## **Method**

This study was a textual analysis of websites belonging to six higher education institutions that have received two of the nation's highest distinctions for community engagement, the President's Community Service Honor Roll Presidential Award and the elective Community Engagement Classification by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. A textual analysis is a way of gathering and analyzing information in academic research in which the researcher makes "an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text" (McKee, 2001, p. 139). Using quantitative and qualitative methods, each university's website content, including navigational structure, website copy, and coverage of campus-community partnerships, was analyzed for indicators of reciprocity using foundational literature regarding campus-community partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, 2003; Principles, 2006; Torres & Schaffer, 2000; Clayton et al., 2010).

For this study, a small sample of six universities was chosen for analysis in order to allow for a complete census of each website and a thorough cross-sectional look at various types of communications and web pages. Through a purposive sample, the six institutions were chosen because of the dual recognition of being named a Presidential Finalist on the President's Community Service Honor Roll and receiving the Community Engagement Classification from Carnegie (Community Engagement Elective Classification, 2011). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select the cases included in the sample based on what is typical of the population of interest (Keyton, 2011).

Since 2006, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has designated American universities with the elective Community Engagement classification (Community Engagement Elective Classification, 2011). To receive the classification, universities must,

through a rigorous application process, provide “descriptions and examples of institutionalized practices of community engagement that show alignment among mission, culture, leadership, resources and practices” (Community Engagement Elective Classification, 2011). The Carnegie classification considers reciprocity a required element of community engagement.

The Corporation for National and Community Service launched the President’s Community Service Honor Roll in 2006 to annually recognize institutions of higher education for achieving meaningful and measurable outcomes in working with communities to solve problems and promote student citizenship (President’s Community Service Honor Roll, 2012).

Because demonstration of reciprocal practices is a requirement for these two recognitions, this study operated under the assumption that the majority of partnerships portrayed in these universities’ communications would indeed be reciprocal partnerships. In order to receive both the Honor Roll’s Presidential Award and the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, universities must have demonstrated reciprocal campus-community relations and display a clear understanding of the importance of reciprocity (Community Engagement Elective Classification, 2011; President’s Community Service Honor Roll, 2012).

The Presidential Award is the highest federal recognition that a university or college can obtain for its work in civic engagement and recognizes institutions “that support exemplary community service programs and raise the visibility of best practices in campus-community partnerships” (Honor Roll Program Book 2012). Similarly, in order to receive the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, universities must have provided information on “two related approaches to community engagement: first, the provision of institutional resources for community use in ways that benefited both the campus and the community and second, collaborations and faculty scholarship that constituted a beneficial exchange, exploration,



discovery, and application of knowledge, information, and resources” (Driscoll, 2008). Based on these requirements, this study assumed that if communications from universities who have been recognized as excelling in these areas lacked reciprocity, the neglect lay with the communications and not the partnerships.

Another reason that these six universities were good candidates for the analysis was that one could easily assume that due to the universities’ advanced community engagement practices, there would be a concerted effort to follow partnership principles in public communications. If analysis revealed a lack of reciprocity indicators in communications, it would be revealing as to the growth needed in this area by even the most qualified universities. There was also the possibility that these universities, because of their advanced campus-community partnerships, would demonstrate best practices in communicating about campus-community partnerships.

More than six universities have received both the Presidential Award and the Carnegie Engagement classification, so the specific universities for this study were selected from the most recent Presidential Award winners cross-referenced with the list of universities with the Carnegie Engagement Classification. Universities must have received the Carnegie Engagement classification in both categories of Outreach and Partnerships and Curricular Engagement. The six institutions were chosen from the most recent Presidential Award winners to increase chances that the website content under analysis was generated in the same time frame as the universities’ national recognition.

Two of the six 2012 Presidential Award winners—Seattle University and Miami University—had received the Carnegie Engagement classification and four of the six 2010 Presidential Award winners—Augsburg College, Rollins College, Loyola University and St. Mary’s University—had received the classification (President’s Community Service Honor Roll,

2012). (Note: In 2012, the Corporation for National and Community Service changed the way it numbered Honor Roll years. Now institutions are recognized for the Honor Roll year in which the award is given instead of for the academic year of the service. Because of this, there was no 2011 Honor Roll). Table 1 describes each university's demographics.

The sample was biased toward private universities due to the fact that in the last three years of the Honor Roll, only six universities out of the 17 awardees were public. Aside from being predominantly private, the sample universities represented a variety of sizes, regions, and religious affiliations.

The websites were analyzed by one reviewer (this study's author) over several weeks

*Table 1*

*Demographics of Sample Institutions*

Institution	Location	Level	Religious Affiliation	Undergraduate Instructional Program	Basic	Control	Student population
Augsburg College	Minneapolis, Minnesota	4-year or above	Lutheran	Balanced arts & sciences/ professions	Master's L	Private not-for-profit	4,010
Loyola University Chicago	Chicago, Illinois	4-year or above	Jesuit Catholic	Balanced arts & sciences/ professions	Research University	Private not-for-profit	15,879
Miami University-Oxford	Oxford, Ohio	4-year or above	N/A	Balanced arts & sciences/ professions	Research University	Public	16,884
Rollins College	Winter Park, Florida	4-year or above	N/A	Arts & sciences plus professions	Master's L	Private not-for-profit	3,294
Seattle University	Seattle, Washington	4-year	Jesuit Catholic	Balanced arts & sciences/ professions	Master's L	Private not-for-profit	7,751
St. Mary's University	San Antonio, Texas	4 year	Catholic Marianist	Balanced arts & sciences/ professions	Master's L	Private not-for-profit	3,893

Information retrieved from [http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/lookup\\_listings/index.php](http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/lookup_listings/index.php)

during April and May of 2012. Review of a website always began on the university's homepage, where functions such as "search," "about us," and "a to z" were used to identify content relevant to community engagement. News archives and university publications were also analyzed. This study analyzed articles from January 2008 and later, with the idea that all of the universities received their Carnegie Community Engagement classification in 2008 or later and would be more likely to demonstrate reciprocity during this time period. Content was deemed relevant to community engagement if it related to the "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities," especially as related to service initiatives (Community Engagement Elective Classification, 2011).

All content pertaining to community engagement was analyzed for indicators of reciprocity, operationalized through Bringle and Hatcher's relationship theory and principles/indicators from Campus Compact and Campus-Community Partnerships for Health (Bringle & Hatcher, 2003; Principles, 2006, Torres & Schaffer, 2000).

The following questions were used to guide the textual analysis:

1. Does the website provide clear and easy access for community partners who are looking for specific program or services?
2. Is there a clear sense of community partners' identities and missions?
3. Is there evidence of mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge & resources between university and community partners?
4. Are campus-community partnerships represented as transformational?
5. Is collaborative language used to describe campus-community partnerships?

To determine if partnerships were represented in a transformational nature, websites were analyzed for indication of attributes included in the TRES model (Clayton et al., 2010). Specifically, closeness was indicated by diverse projects or project evolution, equity was

represented through descriptions of collaborative decision making or interdependency, and integrity was indicated by description of a shared vision. Websites were also analyzed for evidence of shared power and resource contribution. Evidence of collaborative language was present if there were descriptions of the university working “with” the community rather than “helping” or doing “for” the community.” If an article contained evidence of collaborative language (i.e. working with) but also mentioned “helping” or “doing for” the community, the article was not considered reciprocal. Results were examined within and across universities.

## **Results**

The content analyzed in this study includes university homepages, community engagement office homepages, online brochures, social media channels, and articles on university websites, including feature articles and news releases, as found in news archives, newsletters, and magazines. This study uses the term “main page” to describe a subpage of the university homepage, using it most often in reference to an “About Us” page.

Results are divided into the five areas of investigation: community access to university, a clear sense of the community partner’s identity, presence of mutually beneficial exchange, transformational relations, and collaborative language. The final section looks at the universities individually to determine the extent to which their communications demonstrate reciprocity in partnerships.

### **Access**

Although best practices suggest engaged universities provide standardized access for community partners and encourage feedback and involvement, it was clear from this study’s outset that there were many barriers for community partners to gain access to the university’s resources. Three of the six university homepages omitted community partners as a stakeholder by providing helpful links specific to only four audiences: “Potential (or Future) Students,” “Parents and Family,” “Current Students,” “Alumni & Friends.” In each case, “Alumni & Friends” links to the Alumni Affairs website and contains no information for simply “Friends.”

A common feature on any homepage is the ‘Contact Us’ page. The universities in this study each approached this facet differently, with some providing contact information for specific individuals and others directing particular inquiries to the correct department. Of the universities providing information on whom to contact for specific inquiries, none supplied

information regarding how community members could get involved with the institution. Loyola offered “quick connections to the office you need” and listed information for each college, the University’s institutes, the office of continuing education, and alumni affairs (“Contact Us,” 2012). Yet, the listing did not include the university’s community engagement office.

For community partners who are web savvy, there is some direction available through use of website search functions. Even if a community partner is familiar with website navigation, however, there are still two major barriers to finding the correct office.

First, the search function is useless unless partners use the right language. Although academics tend to use the words ‘engagement’ and ‘outreach,’ ‘volunteer’ and ‘community service’ are more common words in the non-profit community, suggesting these words would be the keywords most often used in a search. For this reason, university websites in this study were searched using three main words: ‘volunteer,’ ‘service,’ and ‘community.’ Of the keywords ‘service,’ ‘volunteer’ and ‘community,’ ‘volunteer’ was the word that yielded most helpful results. For most of the websites, a search for ‘service’ revealed services for students, and ‘community’ linked to resources for the campus community; only in a few cases did these keywords lead to the correct department. Second, even if a visitor to the site used the correct keyword, the numerous and varied results were overwhelming. Table 2 summarizes results from each university’s search. Results were wide-ranging and confusing, with pages upon pages of links to news releases, department websites, initiatives, and listings of volunteer opportunities.

Miami University’s website was the most difficult to navigate because of the high number of outreach initiatives. From the university’s main pages, the “About Miami” section links to “Miami in the Community,” which provides a long list of projects and initiatives divided into Teacher Education; Research and Scholarship; Conservation and Preservation and;

Community Outreach and Development (Miami University, 2011). From an outsider's perspective, the projects seemed to only loosely fit into their categories (for example, the campus radio station was listed under Community Outreach) and it was unclear how a few of the projects were affiliated with the university (the local chapter of the National Audubon society was included). The list did include numerous opportunities for community to get involved through project-specific listservs and online resources. This page would only be helpful to a community partner whose interests fell under one of the included projects, but for community partners who may be interested in learning more about general opportunities, there were no links to the various community engagement offices on campus.

The A-Z function on many university websites alphabetize campus areas and topics and provides links to more information. Again, for this to be a useful resource, community partners must know what keywords to use. The universities in this study listed the various community

<i>Table 2</i>				
<i>Search Engine Results for the Keywords "Service" "Volunteer" and "Community"</i>				
Institution	Results 1	Results 2	Results 3	Results 4
Loyola University Chicago	School of Social Work Volunteer Opportunities	Alumni Volunteer Opportunities	Office of Campus Ministry	Center for Community and Global Health
St. Mary's University	VITA program, College of Business	Civic Engagement and Career Center	Service Scholars, College of Business	Center for Legal and Social Justice
Rollins College	Alumni Day of Service	Service-Learning	Office of Community Engagement	Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership Center
Augsburg College	Service-Learning in the College of Education	Career and Internship Center	Center for Service Work and Learning	Center for Global Engagement
Seattle University	Center for Community Service and Engagement	Institute of Public Service	Youth Initiative	Alumni Volunteer Opportunities
Miami University	Center for Community Engagement in Over-the-Rhine	Office of Community Engagement and Service	Partnership Office	Volunteer System

engagement offices first by the names of the offices, and secondly, if at all, under the following keywords: ‘serve,’ ‘service-learning,’ ‘community service-learning’ and ‘community engagement.’ It is debatable that a community organization unfamiliar with academia would know to look under any of these keywords. It is also worth noting that on one university website, the A-Z list linked to two community engagement departments that did not come up in the results of the website search function. There were also some misleading links; one A-Z list did not have a listing under ‘service’ or ‘service-learning’ but linked to a ‘service excellence initiative.’ Upon investigation, this information was shown to pertain to services for students, not service to the community.

The above information describes how a prospective community partner might begin looking for ways to get involved in the university. A different audience is community partners with already established relationships with the university and some familiarity with the department associated with the partnership. These partners can bypass the university homepage and go directly to the website of the office that coordinates the initiatives of interest. This study found that community engagement sites were better than university main pages at providing access, direction, information, and resources for community partners. Moreover, there were several examples of innovative practices for communicating with community partners, which are described later in this section. Still, there were two of these highly engaged universities which contained no information for community partners.

On the website for the Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning at Augsburg College, where the President’s Honor Roll logo is prominently displayed, there is no information for a community partner who might be interested in getting involved or looking for resources to assist them in their campus-community partnerships (Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning, 2012).



Unlike many of the community engagement sites analyzed in this study, which were organized into faculty, student, and community sections, Sabo's site structure did not target any specific audience. Sabo's community relations page identified the Center's priorities, which included building and maintaining strong relationships with community organizations and identifying opportunities for engagement (Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning, 2012a). There is a clear disconnect between the Center's priorities and its website, which failed at supporting these priorities by not providing first, a means for community organizations to build relationships and second, resources or feedback mechanisms to enable partners to maintain (and improve) their relationships.

The Civic Engagement and Career Development Center (CECDC) at St. Mary's University also was limited in its accessibility for community partners. Unlike the Sabo Center, which lacked information overall, the CECDC outreach website contained information for St. Mary's students and faculty but neglected community partners as possible visitors ("Civic Engagement", n.d.). As a center that encompasses both career services and civic engagement, the website did provide information for 'employers.' Under the section for employers, the ability to enter service opportunities in the CECDC's database was the extent of community partner access. The site neglected to explain the nuances between internships, co-ops, volunteerism, and service-learning and actually portrays them as one. Under the small section on service-learning, there were four links to more information, but every link was broken.

The community engagement sites of the four remaining universities did an excellent job at serving as a resource for community partners, although on each website, it was a challenge to get to the right information. Loyola University has several outreach offices, including the Center for Community Service and Action (CCSA) and the Center for Experiential Learning (CEL),

which both had information for community partners. The CCSA's partnerships section explained the different forms of service at the university and invited partners to contact them to "propose a connection" (Center for Community Service and Action, 2012). However, there was no information under the different forms of service directing visitors to the engagement office that coordinates that form of service.

Loyola's CEL website (Center for Experiential Learning, 2012) serves as a good model for practice in campus-community relations. As an initial entry point, its "Contact Us" section provided detailed instructions for off-campus partners to find CEL's location. One main link, "Partner with Loyola," explained the importance of community partners to the University and spelled out explicit procedures for establishing a partnership. These procedures also incorporated suggestions for establishing a successful partnership. Back on CEL's homepage, there were several options presented under a section title and link saying "I want to...", with a landing page that provided direction and was divided into students, faculty/staff, and community/employer partners. In the community partner section, there were instructions and links explaining the various ways to connect with the university's outreach initiatives. It provided separate links for a) employing students b) advertising volunteer opportunities c) posting internships d) partnering with the Center for Experiential Learning e) attending a recruiting fair, and f) partnering with the Center for Community Service and Action. Options A through C linked to RamblerLink, which allows community organizations to post employment, volunteer, and internship opportunities into a searchable database.

Perhaps the most innovative partnership feature of the Loyola CEL website was its "report an incident" function (Incident Report, 2012). This form asked students, faculty, and/or community partners to report any occurrence during an experiential activity that presented a risk.

It defined an incident as “any experience you had on site, in transit to/from a site, or with a Loyola student that you feel put you, your fellows students/volunteers/staff/persons, and/or your clients at risk” (Incident Report, 2012, para. 1). The page explained that the report would initiate a dialogue between CEL and necessary parties, which may include faculty, student, or community partners. The form asked specific multiple choice questions but also provided space for a written response, and all questions were inclusive regardless of whether it was a student, faculty, or community partner submitting the form. Submitters are asked for the best method by which the CEL staff can contact them.

At Rollin’s Office of Community Engagement (OCE), the website invited visitors to connect with community engagement, describing the different ways in which the school collaborates with community partners (“Community Engagement,” 2012). Organizations could post to the Office’s event calendar and submit news and opportunities to an electronic newsletter distributed to faculty, staff, and students six times a year. Non-profits were invited to meet with OCE staff members to discuss ideas for mutually beneficial relationships, or organizations could request that OCE staff visit their service site and generate ideas for partnership through a needs assessment. There was also a Community Partnership form through which organizations could submit general or specific partnership opportunities.

Rollins OCE advertised several ways in which community partners could get involved with OCE, including two community organization fairs and a local conference (“Community Engagement,” 2012). One innovative idea in which organizations could participate was a community partner tour for new faculty during the fall semester. Like several of the other universities studied, OCE listed the other offices at Rollins involved in community engagement, along with an explanation of each unit’s focus and a link to each webpage.

Interestingly, one of the units Rollins OCE linked to was the university's public relations office, which had a subunit called Community Relations. Once on the public relations homepage, the first choice on in the navigational menu was 'Community Relations' before links to 'For the Media' and 'News Center.' The banner for the "Community Relations" page identified it as "Rollins' Connection to the Community" ("Community Relations – Rollins College," 2012). Although there were some brief descriptions of Rollins' largest outreach initiatives, the page's primary purpose was as a resource to the community. It included a comprehensive list of events open to the community with information about location, times, and event details. The "speaker bureau" page listed university contacts who were available to visit area clubs or local schools. Visitors could sign up for the e-newsletter, which published information about events involving the public. Finally, the page provided several links to the various university departments involved in community engagement ("Community Relations – Rollins College," 2012). While this page was a strong effort to connect with the community and the only one of its kind in the six universities analyzed in this study, it is still worth noting that there was nothing on the university's main pages that directed community partners to this page. The page cannot be a true resource if community visitors never find it.

Miami's Office of Community Engagement and Service (OCES) was the closest thing Miami had to an umbrella office for community engagement initiatives, although there were numerous offices on campus involved in community outreach. Once a visitor had navigated to OCES' page, there was much more direction on how to get involved. Under 'For Community Partners,' visitors could choose to learn about 'ways to partner' and 'resources' (Miami University Office of Community Engagement and Service, 2012). The 'ways to partner' page offered information on one-time service projects, ongoing service projects, service-learning,

work study, engaged research, and service guides (students assigned to community organizations in order to coordinate volunteers). Organizations could propose a project through an online form. OCES is a model of good practice in the resources it offered community partners, which included a fact sheet on community-based learning, a list of starting points for community organizations to develop service-learning partnerships, and a resource guide on supervising students engaging in service-learning or community service. It also provided information and ordering instructions for a Campus Compact book written specifically for community partners on developing campus-community partnerships.

One more unique idea is Seattle University's Community Connections newsletter which was published every semester by the university's marketing department and focuses on the institutions' engagement efforts. This publication was geared toward community partners and was distributed free of charge to the SU community and surrounding neighborhoods ("Connections Newsletter," 2012a). The newsletter provided various information of importance to community partners. Each newsletter also had a section entitled "You're Invited" that lists campus events community partners may be interested in attending. The newsletter solicited feedback from its community partners, even offering incentive prizes for ideas or suggestions, and included a "Contact Us" section.

## **Identity**

Analysis of university websites in this study showed overall good representation of community partner identities. As with the prior research question, the websites for the community engagement offices provided a clearer sense of community partner identity (i.e. name, mission, needs, strengths, goals) than the main university pages.

On the universities' main pages, community partner identity was most commonly represented as the context or setting for the university and its teaching and learning objectives. From a main page of Rollins College, for example: "At Rollins, you'll be part of a community that lives, explores, and learns together on campus and around the world" ("Why Rollins College," 2012, para. 1). The word 'community' links to Rollins' Office of Community Engagement's site, which as described below, elaborates on to whom 'community' refers ("Community Engagement," 2012). In most cases, however, university main pages did not recognize the universities' key community partners. Augsburg College's "About Us" page, despite describing the city as its metropolitan classroom, neglected to provide specific information about the identity of its community partners – the very same partners who were providing the "boundless opportunities" described in the introduction (Augsburg College, 2012). On St. Mary's "Points of Pride" page, several accomplishments were listed under the heading of Engagement and Service, yet there was no mention of the community partners involved in the service initiatives ("Points of Pride", 2012). The "About Loyola" page explained how its location in the city allowed for rich diversity of thought and experience, recognizing the neighboring cultural institutions, Fortune 500 companies, internships, and networking opportunities, but omitted its non-profit service partners altogether ("About Loyola," 2012). Seattle University's main pages mentioned nothing about local community engagement efforts, although there was a section on Global Learning that identified international opportunities (Seattle University, 2012).

The shining example at communicating community partner identity on its main pages was Miami University, which approached partner identity differently than any of the other universities in the study. The "Miami in the Community" section on the "About Miami University" page is a long list of outreach initiatives divided into 4 focus areas (Miami

University, 2011). Each initiative is a link, taking the visitor to a separate website altogether. In most cases, the URLs of these sites did not appear to be hosted by the university; similarly, the sites did not visually represent the initiative as a university initiative, but rather, a collaborative effort between on- and off-campus partners. For example, the university address, logo, or slogan was not in the headers or footers, the navigational menu did not link back to the university homepage, and overall there was no strong use of the university brand (see Figure 2). In terms of partner identity, each initiative's website was different, most providing a list of partners involved in the initiative (including Miami University) with a small blurb about the organization's mission, its logo, address, and, if available, a link to its website. The "Miami in the Community" page exemplified two best practices, providing information about the community partners involved in the university's hallmark engagement initiatives and representing university and community as equal



Figure 2. Website of service initiative from Seattle University that demonstrates shared power between community and university. Retrieved from The Center for Environmental Education. (2012). *The Center for Environmental Education homepage* [website], May 1, 2012, from: <http://www.environmentaleducationohio.org/index.html>

partners and co-teachers, so much so that it is unclear who owns or maintains the initiative's website.

In an analysis of the sample university articles describing campus-community partnerships, 70 out of the 110 articles, or approximately 64 percent, identified the community partner. For all but one of the universities, there were more articles that identified the community partner than articles that did not (see Figure 3).

Articles demonstrated different levels of identification for community partners; there were articles that identified only the name of the community partner, others described the partner's mission, and others went so far as to give more in-depth descriptions of the partner's history, demographics, struggles, and assets. Overall, eight of the articles describing campus-community partnerships explained the mission of the community partner. Six articles provided background information about the circumstances and systemic causes that contributed to the need for the services.

On the websites of the universities' community engagement offices, all but one of the office websites listed the school's community partners. The exception was St. Mary's, a

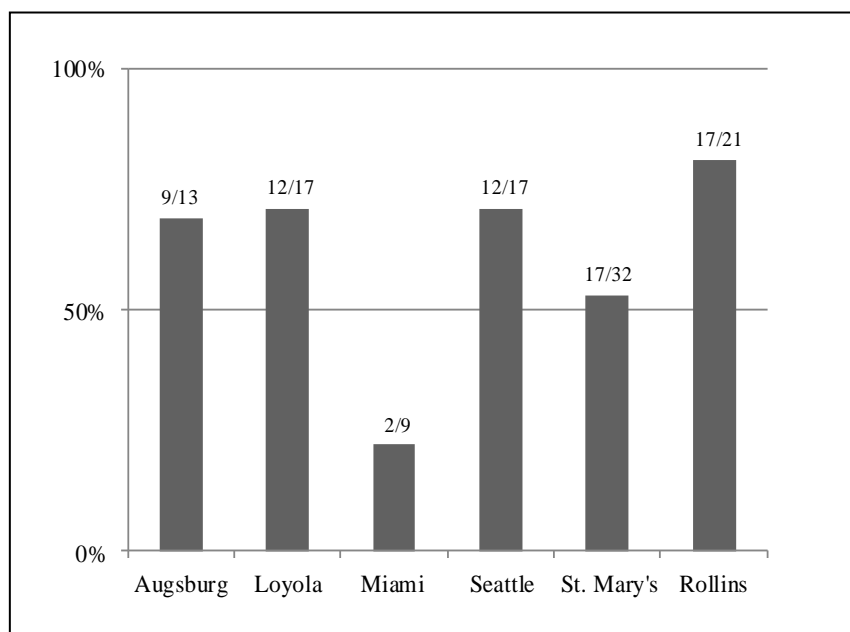


Figure 3. Percentage of articles describing campus-community partnerships that indicate evidence of community partner identity.



university that had a very limited community engagement website. This was partly due, assumedly, to the fact that the community engagement functions of the university were part of the career services department and the website often merged information for and about community partners with the information for employers (“Civic Engagement”, n.d.). Apart from these limitations, however, there was further indication on the university’s other outreach pages that community partner identity was not a priority. One of the university’s signature outreach programs is a scholarship program for students; as part of the program, the student scholars participate regularly in service-learning activities (“Greehey Scholars Program,” 2012). The website provided information on the students’ service initiatives, along with a list of the community partners. Unlike all of the other universities in the study, however, this list only provided partnering organization names without descriptions or links to more information. Spread throughout the page were quotes from university staff, as opposed to community partners, attesting to the impact students were having on the community. This portrayal suggests that the service initiatives at this University were more charity-oriented and omits the community partner perspective.

For the other community engagement pages in the study, community partners were generally identified through a list linking to their websites and/or with a small blurb under their name. There was some variation on how this was accomplished. Miami University’s partnerships office as well as its community engagement office described their partners as a part of information about specific initiatives. One thing Miami did well was include information about community partner assets; for example, it was noted when area partner schools had received high marks from the state education department.

On the website of the Office of Community Engagement at Rollins University, a list of community partners was divided into the following focus areas: arts and culture, civic and political, education, environment, health, human rights and immigration, hunger and homelessness, senior adults, women and gender, and youth (“Community Engagement,” 2012). The name of each organization linked to its website.

Similarly, Seattle University’s Center for Community Service and Engagement had a page under its community partners section that listed the center’s partner organizations and linked to their websites (“CCSE Community Partners, 2011). The Center also offered a color-coded, interactive map pinpointing each organization’s location (see Figure 4). Organizations were categorized into focus areas (children, environmental, poverty, etc) and each focus area was assigned a color. A pin of the relevant color marked the agency’s location on a map.

Seattle’s individual initiatives, the Youth Initiative and Children’s Literacy Project, each provided thorough information on the initiative’s community partners, which were mostly schools, describing the challenges that these schools and students faced but also describing some of their assets (“Youth Initiative,” n.d.; “Program Overview,” n.d.).

At Augsburg College, there was a significant difference between how the two centers involved in service identified its community partners. The Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning (CCL) had a very sparse website in general with a noticeable lack of information about community partner identity (Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning, 2012). Only a few of the CCL’s initiatives listed the identity of the community partners involved. Those initiatives that did identify the community partner did so thoroughly, however, describing the demographics and history of the community served and a recap of the organization’s history and mission.

The university's other service center, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship (CDC), portrayed community partnership in a vastly different way (Center for Democracy and Citizenship, 2012). The CDC's initiatives were described as collaborative efforts in which Augsburg was just one of the participants. Most of the initiatives were described in a narrative, and community partners' websites and names were included throughout. Each page provided a multitude of rich resources that had been co-authored with community partners for the intention of providing information to new community partners interested in joining the initiative. One aspect of these pages set Augsburg apart from the others in the study; each initiative's page also included community-engaged scholarship that came from the project. The scholarship provided an additional means for visitors to learn about the community partner. Examples of the scholarship included evaluations of the projects, background on the community, program models, and for one initiative, a collection of writings from community partners. The collection was entitled *Voices of Hope: The Story of the Jane Addams School for Democracy* and featured 22 essays by twelve writers, including non-native English speakers (Center for Democracy and Citizenship, 2012a). The CDC's website serves as a fine example of not only identifying the

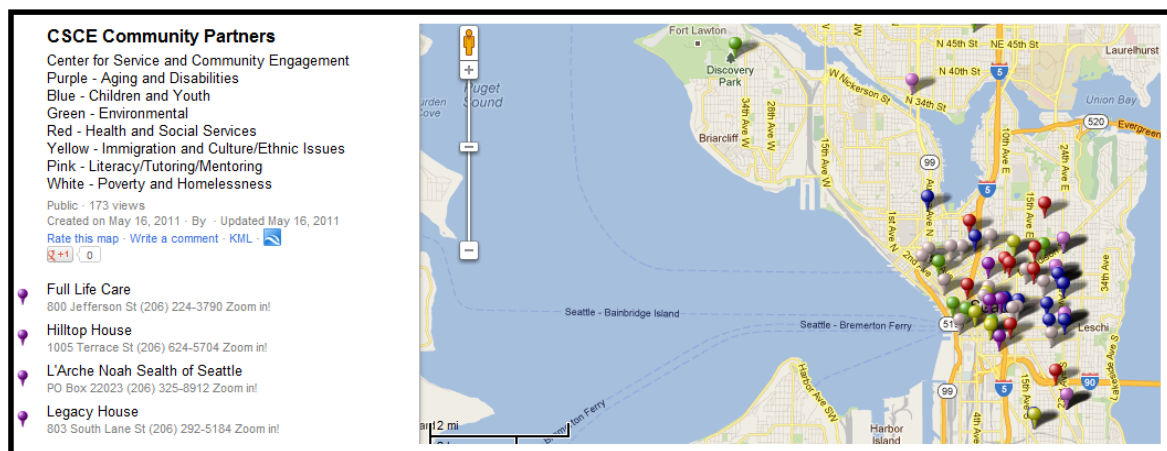


Figure 4. Community partner identity as represented through Seattle University's Center for Community Service and Engagement's color-coded, interactive map. Retrieved from Center for Community Service and Engagement. (2011). *CSCE community partners - Google maps* [website], May 1, 2012, from: <http://www.seattleu.edu/csce/community/partners/>

community integral to its outreach initiatives, but fully integrating their voice into that representation.

Seattle University offered a unique view of community partner identity through its Community Connections newsletter, which is published by the university's marketing department and pertains to the university's community engagement initiatives ("Connections Newsletter," 2012a). Each issue profiles a new community partner, publishing an interview with them about their work and their involvement with the university. Many of the profiles also include quotes from university partners about the importance of the community partner to the university. Another feature in the newsletter is a profile of someone at the university who regularly interfaces with the neighboring community, such as a campus police officer, facility services staff, and volunteers or staff who work regularly with the community.

Loyola University offered the most innovative representation of community partner identity, with a Take Action! guide co-created by the three university outreach centers ("Take Action!," 2012). The guide, available electronically, was linked to from each of the center's websites. This guide to service opportunities and organizations lists seven pages of community organizations with a small description of each. The organizations are categorized into focus areas: community centers, elderly, environment/animals, financial, fine arts, HIV/AIDS, hospice/respite, hospitals/health care, hunger relief, immigrants/refugees, persons with disabilities, shelters/housing advocacy, tutoring and education, and youth. After reviewing the guide, students can log onto the "e-recruiting" database, search for specific organizations or focus areas, learn more about each organization, and sign up for community service, service-learning, field experience, federal work study, and/or internship opportunities. Through the e-

recruiting tool, community partners control the information in the database and can choose to have students contact them directly or go through one of the three outreach centers.

## Mutual Benefits

The idea of campus-community partnerships being mutually beneficial was not evident anywhere on the universities' main pages and was reserved to community engagement office websites, articles, and in one case, a social media channel.

Of the articles about campus-community partnerships, 58 articles described mutual benefits whereas 52 did not. Three universities had more articles describing mutual benefits and three universities had more articles that did not describe mutual benefits (see Figure 5).

One of the universities was

skewed toward a specific direction; all but one of Rollins' articles described mutual benefits.

Although evidence of mutual benefits was only present in roughly half of the articles, when it was included, authors clearly articulated many of the university benefits that are known to occur from thoughtful service. All six of the universities had articles citing the benefit of increased learning of course content. Leadership was the second most common benefit cited and awareness of social justice issues was also an occurring theme. Critical thinking, cultural

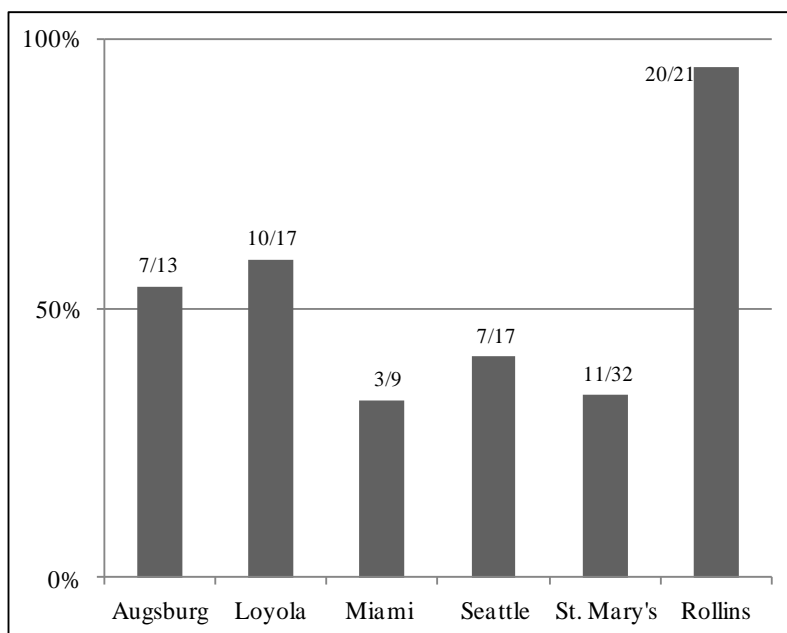


Figure 5. Percentage of articles describing campus-community partnerships that indicate evidence of mutual benefits.

competency, self-awareness and citizenship were also cited as benefits for university partners working with the community.

Some of the universities also included information about community engagement through other forms of media. One innovation was a social media channel on Loyola's website called igNation, through which the Loyola community could submit videos and blog entries on various topics (igNation, 2012). On igNation, users must log in with a campus ID before submitting an entry. Though the channel included some student entries, most content appeared to be generated by university departments.

igNation's video channel included three promotional videos about Loyola service-learning. In one video, service-learning is described as students engaging in service and reflecting on it in class to relate it to course content (Loyola University Undergraduate Admission, 2012). However, the video's subsequent interviews with students only described service, not their learning. Another video interviews three faculty about their specific service-learning projects, and each faculty discusses how his or her project benefited both students and community partners (Niksic, 2011). In the third video, service-learning staff, faculty, and students focus heavily on the learning aspect of service-learning by describing how their service-learning projects have informed student learning (Niksic, 2011a). All of these videos provide evidence of student benefits but only imply benefits to the community partners; without the community partners' voice, it is not clear that the service was actually of benefit to the community.

As expected, community engagement offices' websites provided a clearer picture of the mutually beneficial nature of campus-community partnerships than general university communications. The concept of mutual benefits was articulated explicitly on the pages of most

community engagement offices. In two of the six universities, mutual benefits were vaguely alluded to, suggesting that even community engagement offices have room for improvement in this area.

At Augsburg's Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning (CCL), the language primarily emphasizes the need for students to be involved in service without describing how their service fulfills community needs (Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning, 2012). Moreover, it does not frame community engagement as important for reasons outside of the university's goal of producing democratic citizens. In fact, it describes the community as a living laboratory. Under its "Community Relations" section, it explains that part of the CCL's purpose is to "help identify and coordinate value-added opportunities for engagement with the community" (Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning, 2012a, para. 3). Although this statement could be interpreted to include consideration of community needs, it does not directly reference working with the community to identify those needs.

At St. Mary's, there was little effort to describe the importance of mutual benefits. Although there was ample description of how service would benefit students, there were no details about ensuring community needs were met. The importance of meeting community needs was only articulated in the definition of service-learning provided on the website of the civic engagement office.

One particular statement describing service-learning was a good representation of the disconnect between the idea of service-learning and how St. Mary's presented it on their website:

"Students, faculty, and community partners - each in their own unique way - will certainly be giving their time, talent, energy, and creativity to the process; in return, they will have learned issues affecting a certain population, the systemic issues of the larger community, time management, application and better retention of learning objectives, among other important skills and assets" (Civic Engagement and Career Development Center, 2012).

The first part of this sentence indicates that all partners will have important contributions to give, consistent with the idea of reciprocity in campus-community partnerships. In the second part of the sentence, the benefits of the partnership seem much more in line with what a student, not a community partner, would receive from the project. This places the emphasis again on student needs. Interestingly, this representation is in contrast with the way partnerships are portrayed in St. Mary's press releases and feature articles, which fail to recognize the benefits student receive from participating in service and focus solely on community benefits.

Miami University's Partnership Office, which is a more specialized unit separate from the university's community engagement office, provides an excellent example of language acknowledging the importance of mutual benefits and demonstrating commitment to honoring the concept:

“...the concept of simultaneous renewal lies at the heart of all our partnerships sought and fostered by the office, that is that each party working collaboratively readily gains mutual, tangible benefits from the work” (“Welcome,” 2012).

This statement summarizes much of what the communications described above lack: collaborative design and planning, specific and intentional benefits, and mutual exchange.

### **Transformational Relations**

For this study's purposes, evidence of transformational partnerships was operationaized through the TRES model and indicators of an engaged campus (Clayton et al., 2010; Hollander, Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2001). Evidence of this concept was present if communications indicated any of the below:

- collaborative decision-making or planning
- interdependency between classroom and community partner
- shared vision



- evolution of the partnership
- external resource allocation by partners
- diverse projects
- shared power

In this section, evidence of transformational partnerships was determined by university-level pages in addition to community engagement office websites. There was one university main page that demonstrated evidence of transformational relationships with community partner. On the “About Augsburg” page, the university describes the community as co-teachers and the city of Augsburg as its metropolitan classroom: “We engage with the city—with our neighbors, with arts and culture ... and with all it can teach us about our diverse, urban environment” (Augsburg College, 2012, para. 1).

At Miami University, where the “Miami in the Community” main page takes visitors to a list of 23 engagement initiatives, two of the initiatives’ websites described their community partners as co-teachers. One project describes “each person as an ambassador who creates as well as transmits knowledge, who promotes authentic dialogue at all levels of society...” (“Earth Expeditions,” 2012, para. 2). Another initiative describes the university’s partnership with the area public school system, stating “We believe passionately in the extraordinary learning that comes from each community learning from, and with, the other” (“Talawanda Miami,” 2009, para. 3). There were also various initiatives acknowledging community expertise; for example, Miami University offered classes taught by community members and there were many opportunities and encouragement for the community to access and participate in the sharing of knowledge through listservs, Centers, and online discussion boards (Miami University, 2011).

Overall, of the articles that described campus-community partnerships, 80 articles (approximately 73 percent) did not include evidence of transformational partnerships. Only one of the study's universities,

Seattle University, had more articles than not that showed evidence of transformational partnerships (see Figure 6).

For most of the universities, there was a large range between the number of

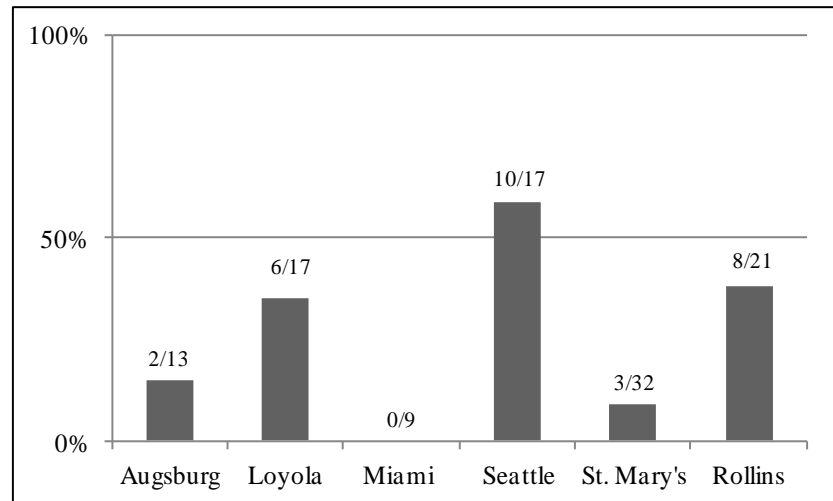


Figure 6. Percentage of articles describing campus-community partnerships that indicate evidence of transformational partnerships.

evidence and the number of articles that did not. For example, there were no articles at Miami containing evidence of transformational partnerships and 29 of 32 of St. Mary's articles neglected this aspect of partnership.

The most common indicator of transformational partnerships was description of collaborative planning, with 15 articles including that information. The next most prevalent indicator was diverse projects, evidence of which 11 articles included.

Evidence of transformational partnerships at Miami University and St. Mary's, the two universities with a significant discrepancy in number of articles including or excluding such evidence, was consistent with each university's performance across all categories. Evidence of partnership overall was not present in most of Miami's articles, in all categories; similarly, most of St. Mary's articles did not include evidence of partnership, with identity being the only category in which more articles included it than did not.

Only three of the community engagement offices' websites showed evidence of transformational partnerships. On the website of the Office of Community Engagement (OCE) at Rollins University, there was an explanation of the Center's three community engagement priorities; one was Community Partnership Development, or "working hand-in-hand with community leaders as co-educators committed to global progress and change" (Meyer, 2012, para. 5). This statement indicated the OCE's belief in the community as a co-teacher and describes its goal to work in collaboration with the community on a shared vision. Their brochure communicated a similar message: "A Rollins education sees the community as a co-educator and partner in teaching and learning" ("Engagement Brochure," 2012, para. 1).

At Miami University, where none of the articles describing campus-community partnerships contained evidence of transformational partnerships but its main pages did, the Office of Community Engagement and Service described its commitment to "experiencing shared power with our community" and "seeing campus and community members as equitable partners" ("About Us," 2012, para. 2). Indeed, there was much about Miami that supported this claim. As described earlier, many of its individual service initiatives described shared power. The Miami Partnership office, which coordinates partnership for the education department, also conveyed evidence of transformational partnerships on its homepage. It described the importance of external resource allocation: "Administering a successful partnership project typically requires extra resources as well as extra effort. The Partnership Office has earmarked two funds to encourage people to work together to enhance the educational experiences of students, faculty, and staff across [the public schools and university]" (Talawanda Miami, 2009, para. 5). There was also a link to a set of bylaws that the two partners had negotiated and established.

Augsburg's Center for Democracy and Citizenship's (CDC) website described its collaborations as "non-hierarchical" (Center for Democracy and Citizenship, 2012). The CDC portrayed itself as just one of many partners involved in these initiatives, and it was clear from the websites that the projects described had reached the state of interdependency. From the projects' descriptions, it was evident that the CDC was a lead partner and often responsible for coordinating logistics, yet the different activities were supported and hosted by other partner organizations. Several partners, including the city, shared the financial responsibility. Each initiative listed numerous diverse projects and explained how new ideas and services had been developed to facilitate the project outcomes. The website described community listening sessions, planning sessions, and a conference for the participants.

### **Collaborative Language**

Because descriptions of campus-community partnerships were mostly not present on main university pages, there was little to be learned from these pages about the use of collaborative language. Augsburg University was the only institution whose main pages described campus-community partnerships. Augsburg used "with" to describe its relationship with the community: "We engage with the city—with our neighbors, with arts and culture ... and with all it can teach us about our diverse, urban environment" (Augsburg College, 2012, para. 1). The very lack of partnership information on institutions' main pages is revealing. Several of the main pages described how students will be molded into good citizens, but offered no indication that this would happen in coordination with community partners.

In articles describing campus-community partnerships, slightly more than half (n=60) used collaborative language to describe campus-community partnerships. However, three of the universities—Augsburg, Seattle, and Rollins—all had more articles that used collaborative

language (see Figure 7). The remaining three universities had a higher number of articles that described universities doing “for”, doing “to”, or “helping” in the context of campus-community partnerships. The outlier was St. Mary’s, which had 14 more articles describing universities “helping”, doing “for”, or doing “to” their community partners.

Articles most often used the word “help” or described doing “to” or “for” when they were describing activities with two groups: low-income or homeless individuals. There were very few examples of overt paternalism in all of the

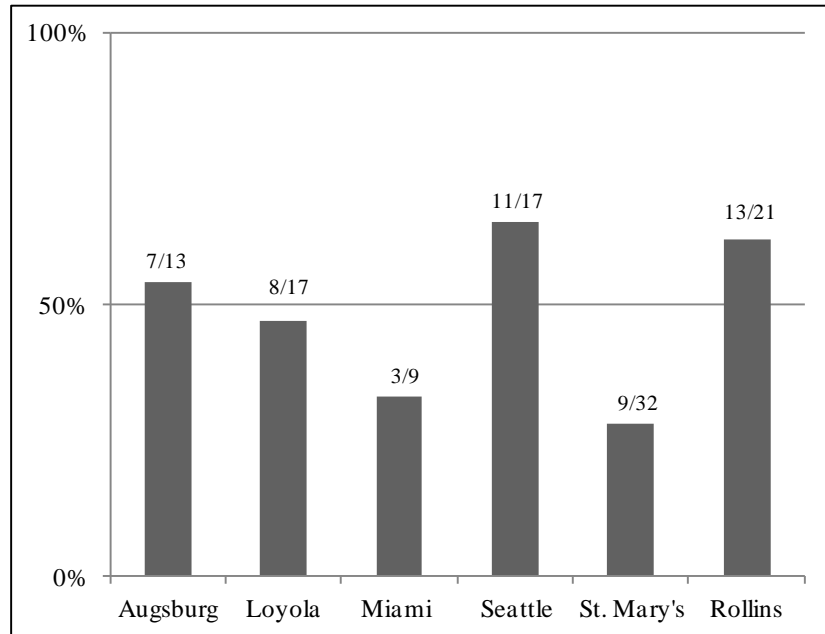


Figure 7. Percentage of articles that use collaborative language to describe campus-community partnerships.

articles analyzed, but it was in articles describing these populations in which words such as “needy” appeared or, as in two articles, a stereotype was presented. Also, the word “help” featured prominently in articles, so much so that it was used in 18 titles of the 110 articles.

Articles describing campus-community partnerships did not always use the terms “with,” “help,” “to,” or “for” but were still able to avoid hierarchical language. A sample of alternative language used by the universities in this study is included in Table 3.

On individual service initiatives' websites, there was mixed success in how service opportunities were listed in a way that emphasized "with-ness." The Loyola4Chicago initiative provided a long list of volunteer opportunities on its website, with the name of the organization and description of opportunity. Two examples from the same page demonstrate how the different language used to

describe service activities can change the way the partnership is perceived; one activity described the opportunity to "work with

*Table 3*

*Examples of Collaborative Language*

Partnered	Engaged	Provided support	Connected with
Teamed up	Enhanced	Provided services	Joined forces
Supported	Served	Participated in	Enriched

middle school boys in an after-school tutoring program" whereas another opportunity was to "provide homework assistance for children" (Serve, 2012).

With a few exceptions, the community engagement offices performed superlatively in this area. Although Rollins OCE was more geared toward the academic audience, using community engagement as an enticement to students interested in becoming socially-responsible citizens, its main page did describe the partnerships the university has with the community:

"Whether it be through civic engagement, mentoring underserved youth, preserving the environment, aiding hunger and the homeless, assisting the elderly and ill, or providing education and support to people affected by violence, service-learning at Rollins will enable you to connect and engage in your passion in creating change in the world" (Meyer, 2012, para. 6).

This paragraph largely avoids the word "help" and although it does use "to" it isn't in the sense of doing "to" but rather supporting. Overall, community engagement offices described most partnership interactions as universities working "with" community partners, as opposed to "to" or "for."

## Individual Universities

All six of the universities were examined individually to see how they performed overall at communicating reciprocity.

**Miami University.** At Miami University, for all reciprocity indicators, there were more articles (see Figure 8) that did not have evidence of reciprocity than articles that did. In other words, more of the articles about campus community partnerships did not demonstrate community partner identity, mutual benefits, transformational partnerships, and collaborative language. This lack of reciprocity was supported by one aspect of Miami’s main pages – the challenges presented for community partners looking for university resources.

Despite these limitations, there were several examples of reciprocity on other parts of Miami’s website. The “Miami in the Community” page was a great example of community partner identity that set Miami apart from

other universities. Miami’s College of Education’s Partnership Office also excelled at using collaborative language to describe campus community partnerships.

Although Miami’s articles contained no evidence of transformational partnerships, there was other compelling evidence that these partnerships existed. Several initiatives described the

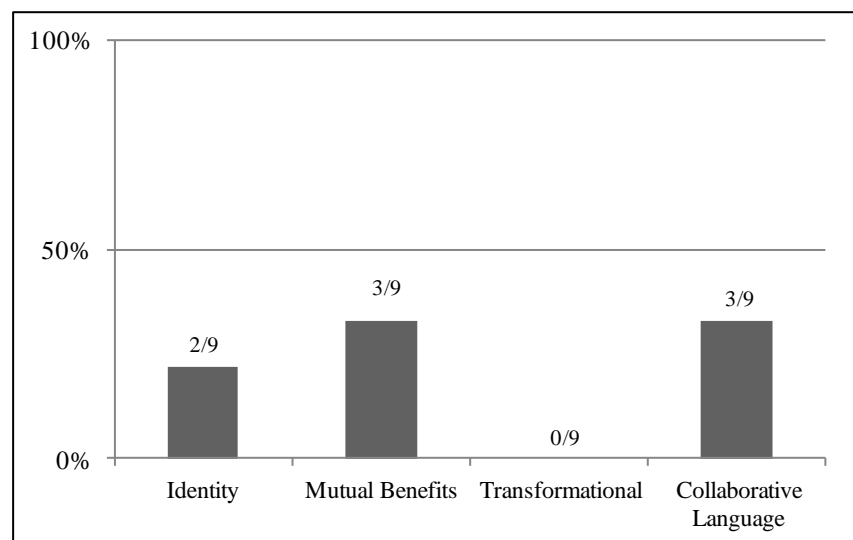


Figure 8. Percentage of articles with evidence of reciprocity indicators at Miami University.

idea of shared power, and there was extensive evidence across the university regarding external resource allocation, a shared vision, and equity.

**Augsburg College.** At Augsburg College, one sentence on its main pages made the university stand out from the others in terms of both collaborative language and transformational relationships. This statement read “We engage with the city—with our neighbors, with arts and culture ... and with all it can teach us about our diverse, urban environment” (Augsburg College, 2012, para. 1). Across the university, there was a tendency to use collaborative language and this was supported by the fact that a higher percentage of the university’s articles contained evidence of collaborative language, although evidence of transformational partnerships was not evident in most of the articles. In fact, transformational partnerships was the only reciprocity indicator that Augsburg articles did not publish more articles with evidence than not (see

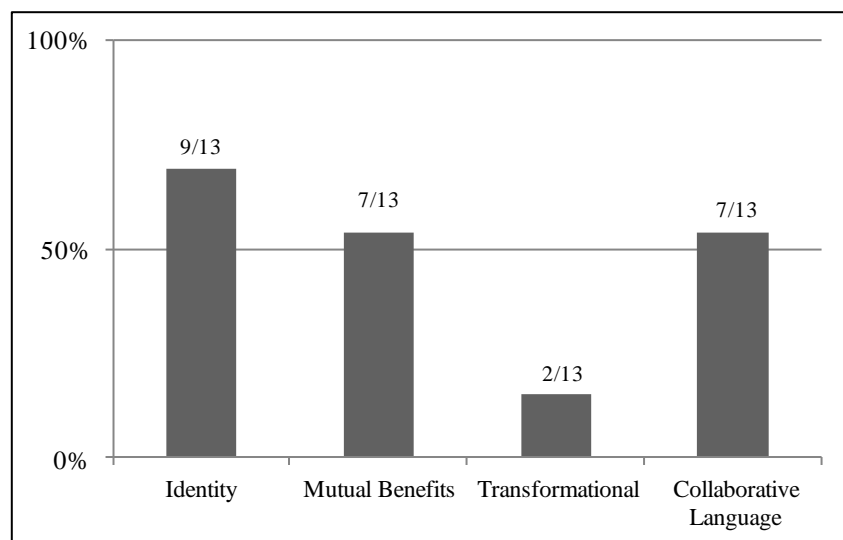


Figure 9. Percentage of articles with evidence of reciprocity indicators at Augsburg College.

Despite the fact that Augsburg mentioned community engagement on its main pages, there was no clear direction from these pages, nor from the individual community engagement offices, for how community partners could get involved with the university. Augsburg was only one of two universities in this study that did not provide this information.



There was great contrast between Augsburg's two civic engagement centers, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship and the Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning. The Center for Democracy and Citizenship was a model of good practice in using collaborative language, providing information on community partner identity, and describing transformational partnerships. However, the Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning did not show evidence of either of these indicators, nor did it demonstrate mutual benefits.

**Rollins College.** Rollins College's homepage uses the institutions' dedication to community engagement as a draw to potential students, and links to the Rollins' Office of Community Engagement to elaborate on the community engagement in which the university is involved. The Office of Community Engagement

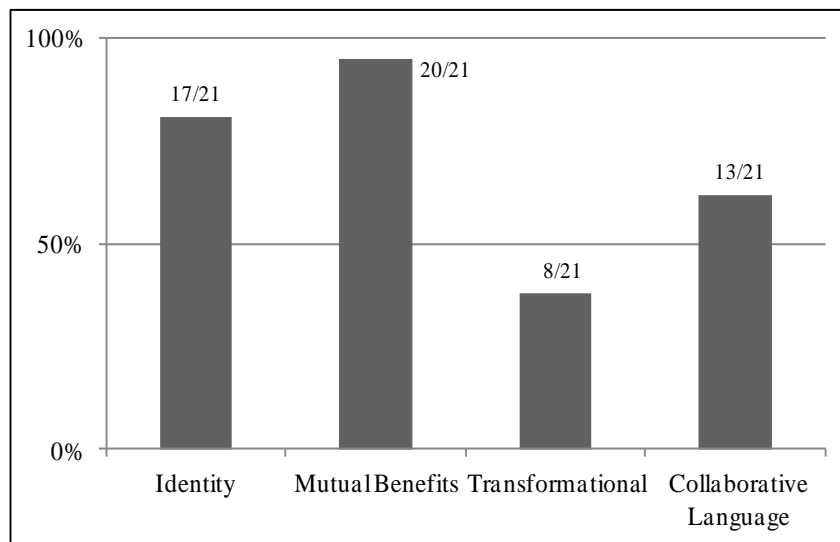


Figure 10. Percentage of articles with evidence of reciprocity indicators at Rollins College.

website is a good model for ways to use collaborative language, which is in line with the fact that most of the university's articles about campus-community partnerships used collaborative language.

The office also was one of two community engagement office websites that provided evidence of transformational partnerships, despite the fact that most of Rollins' articles failed to

describe this aspect of partnership. In fact, for all reciprocity indicators except for evidence of transformational partnership, most Rollins articles had evidence of reciprocity (see Figure 10).

**St. Mary's University.** St. Mary's University was a good model of how universities have room for improvement in communicating reciprocity. While having an active and impressive community service record, there was little evidence of reciprocity in any of its communications. St. Mary's had the largest number of articles describing campus-community partnerships (see Figure 11), but a small percentage of these articles contained evidence of each of the reciprocity indicators. For every reciprocity indicator except for evidence of community partner identity, there were more articles that did not have evidence of reciprocity than articles that did.

Furthermore, St. Mary's community engagement office demonstrated little effort to provide access to community partners, include information on mutual benefits, provide community partner identity, or describe transformational partnerships. Although there was ample description of how service would benefit students, there were no details about ensuring community needs were met. St. Mary's website had the only community engagement page that did not list community partner identity and it was one of only two websites that did not provide resources specific to partners interested in service collaboration.

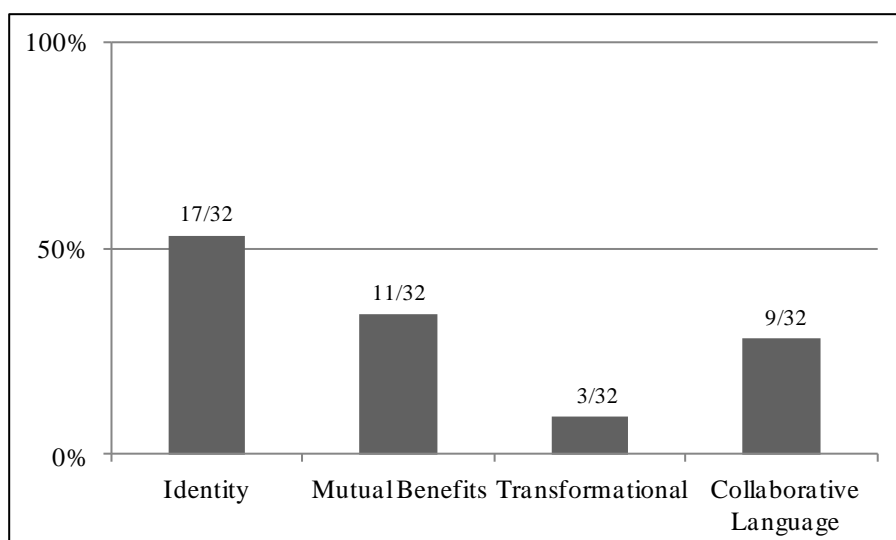


Figure 11. Percentage of articles with evidence of reciprocity indicators at St. Mary's University.

**Loyola University Chicago.** At Loyola University, of the articles that described community engagement, there were more articles describing the reciprocity indicators of identity and mutual benefits; however, for the indicators of transformational relations and collaborative language, there were more articles that lacked evidence of reciprocity than articles that included it (see Figure 12).

This is in contrast with Loyola's performance at communicating reciprocity through other content. The university's community engagement office had several innovative ways to provide

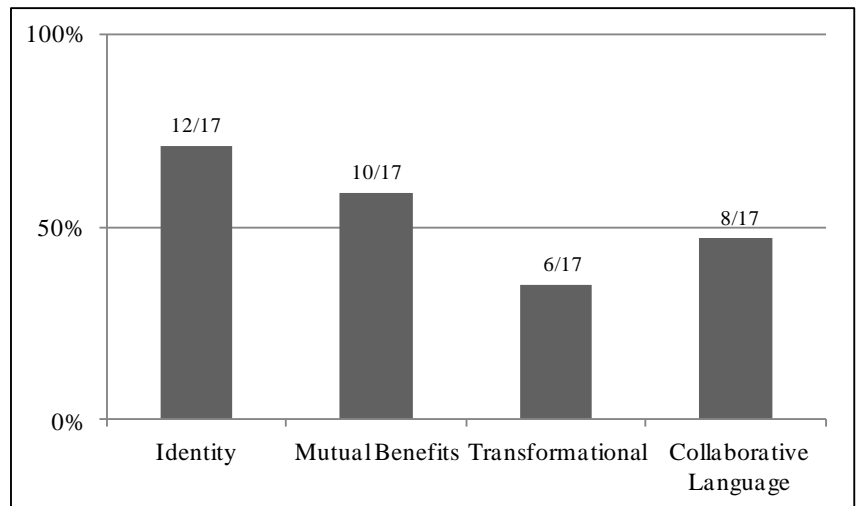


Figure 12. Percentage of articles with evidence of reciprocity indicators at Loyola University.

community access, including an incident report form and a list of ways to get involved that included links to the different departments responsible. Loyola's community engagement offices also collaborated to develop the Take Action! Guide, which provided extensive information on community partner identity. This difference in communication styles illustrates the disconnect between the strategies and intentions of the public relations office and the community engagement offices.

**Seattle University.** Seattle University was a solid communicator in terms of representing reciprocity, with most of its articles about campus-community partnerships providing evidence of every reciprocity indicator except for mutual benefits (see Figure 13). There was no content

that was a poor example of any reciprocity indicator, and in fact, some of the websites' content served as good models.

Seattle University provided several quality examples of how to represent community partner identity. The university's community engagement office provided a unique map of community partner sites color-coded by its focus area (CSCE community partners, 2011).

Additionally, the university publishes a newsletter regarding community engagement efforts and distributes it to its community partners (Connections Newsletter, 2012). This newsletter profiles community partners and provides information about news or events that pertain to community partners.

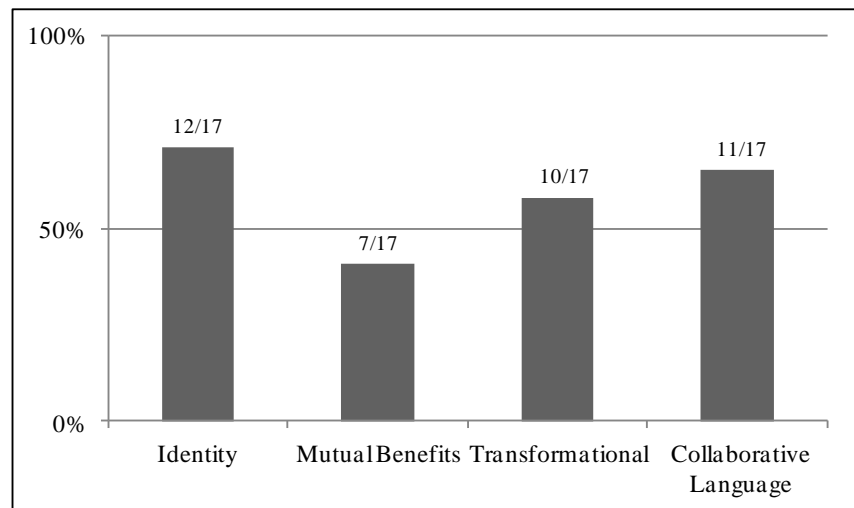


Figure 13. Percentage of articles with evidence of reciprocity indicators at Seattle University.

## Discussion

Overall, at the university level, websites provided little access to community partners interested in getting involved with the university, and community engagement offices at two universities also failed to provide access. University communications outside of the community engagement office regularly neglected descriptions of mutual benefits, evidence of transformational partnerships, and collaborative language. The only reciprocity indicator that these communications regularly included was community partner identity. Community engagement websites provided a clear sense of community partner identity and mutual benefits while using collaborative language; however, evidence of transformative partnerships was sparse across all communications.

These results suggest that, as with so many community engagement efforts, the importance of community engagement has not been institutionalized enough to the point that a) care is taken to accurately portray campus community partnerships in public communications and b) the concept of reciprocity is understood at all levels in the university.

Universities often speak publicly about the importance of reaching out into the neighboring community to work together to address economic, social and educational challenges. As community-engaged practitioners, we talk about giving “voice” to our community partners and breaking down the divide between university gates and surroundings. Yet, analyses of the websites for universities that are “highly engaged” suggest that there are significant barriers for new community partners interested in engaging with universities. Furthermore, it seems that the traditional website design of universities indicates very little consideration of community partners as a university stakeholder who may be accessing the institution’s website. Conditions improve once one finds the website of the department “most”

in charge of community engagement, but globally, there is no clear direction from the university's homepage of which department is the most appropriate contact for community partners. An additional complication is that the homepage and its search function points to multiple community engagement initiatives that present a confusing and overwhelming array of choices.

The way that engagement efforts are spread across different departments is indicative of a larger issue that is at the heart of higher education's conversation about campus-community partnerships. Often, campus service initiatives are fragmented, occurring in separate university departments, with limited ways to collaborate and communicate. In some instances, universities have created an umbrella office for community partnerships and outreach, but for many universities, outreach is still performed in "silos" (Strong, Green, Meyer & Post, 2009). This not only leads to duplication of efforts and missed opportunities for resource sharing, it also is confusing to the community when trying to approach the university with partnership ideas.

University resources are more accessible to community partners who are already familiar with the university offices that handle community engagement or who happen to navigate to the correct webpage. All but two of the community engagement office websites in the study provided guidance to community partners about how to achieve different objectives, and several of the office websites offered mechanisms through which community partners could communicate or provide feedback. The most common way websites accomplished this was through a form to submit service opportunities, although one website allowed partners to submit a form to report incidents. The best practice exemplifying access to community partners was, paradoxically, a program that made community partners more accessible to university partners. This program was offered by Rollins' Office of Community Engagement, and invited

community partners to be sites in a community partner tour for new faculty during the fall semester.

These findings suggest that through community engagement offices, there is some access granted by engaged universities to their community partners, although access may not be easy if the starting point is the university homepage. Additionally, two of these highly engaged universities still provide little to no guidance for community partners on how to get involved, suggesting that access may be worse at less engaged institutions.

According to best practice guidelines, in order for campus-community partnerships to be sustainable, successful, and ethical, projects should be based on reciprocity and mutual benefits. Furthermore, partnerships should be developed with a mind to each partner's identified needs as well as available resources and assets. The concept of mutual benefits is at the heart of almost every definition of service-learning. This study found that the idea of campus-community partnerships being mutually beneficial was not present anywhere on the university main pages and was reserved to community engagement office websites, articles, and in one case, a social media channel. Additionally, evidence of mutual benefits was present in approximately half of the articles analyzed, indicating that universities have much progress to make in communicating the idea of mutual benefits. There were also two community engagement offices that stated the importance of mutual benefits but failed to incorporate this sentiment into the rest of the website. Two components of mutual benefits were regularly missing from these communications: benefits to university partners and evidence that service addressed an actual, community-identified need.

The lack of benefits to university partners cannot be an excuse for this information to be missing; for some time now, there has been quantitative evidence that community engagement benefits university partners. In 1999, Eyler and Giles published "Where's the Learning in

Service-Learning,” producing quantitative evidence of the impact service-learning had on students’ personal, social, and cognitive growth. Astin et al. (2000) found that service-learning has positive effects on GPA, writing skills, critical thinking, values, self-efficacy, and leadership. Ernest Boyer’s article (1996) suggested that the future of higher education depended on community engagement.

But this idea is not necessarily intuitive, nor is it something that has reached the entire academic community. It is still a paradigm shift for many academics to think about the rich resources of the community and how much the community has to teach and give our academic institutions. The idea of mutual benefits is important in university communications, but also in all discussion of community engagement. As this study found, even with some of our most engaged universities, there were still descriptions that made it seem as if university partners “decided” something would be a good service project. If coverage of community-engaged projects serve as models for faculty or community partners interested in similar endeavors, then this is a negligent message to communicate. Anyone planning a service project must think deeply about the nature of the project, ensure community-identified needs are considered before devising partnership plans, and take caution not to assume what it is the community needs. Understanding and considering what service participants can and will receive from the experience is essential. Individuals must move from the basic sense that “service is good” to asking someone else “is this service really good?” One way practitioners can increase awareness of the importance of these questions is by ensuring that descriptions of campus-community partnerships include mutual benefits.

This idea that “service is good” is the primary challenge to communicating the right message to university stakeholders regarding campus-community partnerships. There is still a



persistent notion that acts of service, or helping, benefit the community and participants benefit simply because they have the opportunity to “give back” as a way of showing appreciation for their own blessings. As the number of universities receiving the Carnegie engagement classification and Presidential Honor Roll awards increases, there is no doubt that there is an understanding at these universities of the importance of mutual benefits. Despite this, there is still a tendency, as this study indicates, for university communications to frame service as merely charity.

Upon further investigation into the finding that many of the study’s articles’ described learning outcomes that are well-documented benefits of community engagement, it was revealed that information about university benefits was most often included in a quote from someone familiar with either community engagement or the specific project. Although this does not necessarily mean university benefits would not be included in the absence of these quotations, it does suggest it as a possibility. The fact that direct benefits are mentioned by participants also supports the idea that there is significant awareness of partnership principles at these universities, and yet this knowledge is not making it into over half of the public communications.

The source of the quotes also provided some insight into the state of community engagement at these universities. In some instances, quotes describing campus benefits came from students, suggesting that critical reflection on service is occurring and is achieving its intended effect of developing civic awareness and understanding of social issues. Often the descriptions of benefits came from faculty, but some of the most powerful quotes and examples of reciprocal partnerships came from university presidents. This finding, paired with the national recognition of the universities in this study, supports the close association between support from upper administration and the institutionalization of community engagement.

Universities are large organizations, and it is a daunting task to manage the messages of every unit communicating with its constituents. The analysis of evidence of mutual benefits demonstrated that different offices were putting out different messages. It also showed that the main university pages, most of which highlighted their engagement efforts, were producing communications that disregard the mutual exchange of many campus-community partnerships. With a website, and with a university, communications from any page are perceived as coming from the university, which highlights the importance of this topic to community partner relations. This issue is one of brand management, a strategy undertaken to ensure stakeholders receive a cohesive and consistent message (Anctil, 2008). The first step to communicating a consistent brand in terms of campus-community partnership representations is to make reciprocal messages a priority. Until then, the incongruity of advertising as an engaged university while producing communications reducing community engagement into charitable acts causes disconnect in a university's brand. For brand management, and for purposes of improving campus-community relationships, university communications must catch up with the community engagement field.

As Carnegie-classified engaged universities, the institutions in this study have submitted evidence during the application period of their adherence to the principle of reciprocity. This suggests that the universities are aware of this principle, and strive to meet it. It would logically follow, then, that the websites will reflect this goal. Including the identity of community partners is an important way to acknowledge the contributions of all parties and demonstrate the idea of equally important contributions, shared power, and the equal priority of each partner's needs. This study found that community partner identities were included in publicity about campus-community partnerships and on community engagement websites, although university main pages did not provide a clear sense of the university's key partners.

The regular communication of community partner identity is a positive finding, perhaps explained by the fact that including community partner identity is beneficial to university partners for many reasons. One of the most basic is that it is poor communication practice to omit such an important detail. In journalism, the identity of a recipient of service should be integral to a story, providing context and potentially fulfilling at least four of the five W's (who, what, where, and why), a concept that even the most amateur reporter should know. Additionally, from a public relations standpoint, including the partner's identity opens up opportunities for new stakeholder connections, such as organization supporters and organization affiliates. For example, someone who supports the American Cancer Society can see the good work the university is doing with the organization, opening the door to possible donations or other acts of benevolence.

Another promising finding was the university websites that provided direct links to community partner organizations' websites, published regular profiles of community partners, provided partner site locations, and included community-engaged scholarship that explored partner identity. This latter example, from Augsburg College's Jane Addams School of Democracy, was a remarkable example of communicating community partner identity. The community engagement office responsible for this work, Augsburg College's Center for Democracy and Citizenship, was a strong example of best practices by including information about mutual benefits, identity, and the transformative nature of its partnerships.

The indicators of transformational partnerships are often back-end details that do not assist in defining a partnership for the public; therefore, the exclusion of this evidence should not necessarily be viewed as a misrepresentation of the reciprocal nature of a partnership. Yet, evidence of transformative partnerships was sparse across all six universities, through the

homepages, to the community engagement offices, to articles about campus-community partnerships. The criteria for evidence of transformational partnerships were not extremely burdensome; content had to show evidence of one or more of the following: collaborative decision making or planning, interdependency between class and community partner, shared vision, external resource allocation by partners, evolution of the partnership, diverse projects, or shared power. Only two community engagement offices communicated this information, only one university main page, and 30 out of 110 articles.

Although the content does not mischaracterize campus-community partnerships, including this information should be something to which the community-engaged institution should aspire; such details reinforce the ideas of partnership and evidence the university's dedication to transformative partnerships. While the other reciprocity indicators in this study suggest reciprocal partnerships, evidence of transformational relationships defines reciprocal partnerships. In addition to accomplishing the various objectives discussed above, such as education of the campus community, improved partnerships, brand consistency, and partner recognition, it seems like it would be in the university's best interest to communicate this information. If we're going to tell our stories, we should tell them well.

Part of this idea of telling our story includes the language we use. Patti Clayton and others (2010) have taken the first step to raise awareness among practitioners on how community-engaged practitioners talk about community engagement, yet one wonders if this is enough when appropriate language is only being used in publications geared toward other practitioners. The crucial next step to advance the field is to raise the awareness of university-level communications regarding the power of language, so that it is taken into consideration when producing public communications.

There was a stark difference in how a university's articles described campus-community partnerships and how the university's community engagement offices did. More than half of the articles describing campus-community partnerships used language such as "for" or "to" and the use of the word help was rampant. On the other hand, community engagement offices widely used collaborative language to describe community-engaged projects. Aside from the direct implications "helping" language has, when combined with the lack of other reciprocity indicators, the effects are significant.

In descriptions of community engagement, the language of "for," "to," and "help," when compounded by lack of identity, mutual benefits, or indications of transformational relations, is no less than exploitive treatment of the community. The implications of these four conditions together may not seem at first like such an impediment to the advancement of community engagement but, using the terms outlined in the ideas of TRES model (Clayton et al., 2010), these media representations can put forth an image of campus-community partnerships that is exploitive.

When a university communication suggests that the university is "helping" a partner that is not identified, it elevates the university's importance to a disproportionate level. In a "helping" interaction, if a partner's identity is excluded, it minimizes the contributions of the partner to the relationship and even worse, minimizes the important societal work that the partner does every day. What can the university possibly be doing that is so much "better" than the community partner that the community's identity does not even need to be included? How can we understand the university's contributions without first understanding the organization or people with whom it is working? With an anonymous partner, using language such as "to" and "for"

also speaks from an elevated position high above the community partners, suggesting that the community partners are uninformed and needy.

Using language such as “to,” “for,” or “helping” when evidence of mutual benefits is not present simply reinforces what the lack of mutual benefits suggests. It positions one party in power, at the top of the hierarchy, to deliver a service to the needy partner. Unlike descriptions of activities undertaken “with” partners, this language suggests that there is no reciprocal return of benefits nor collaborative planning or community input. These ideas go against the very nature of campus-community partnerships.

The ideas of mutual benefits and identity are important components of transformative partnerships, so the effects of language described above also impact how transformative partnerships are represented. Because transformative partnerships are all about “we”, there is little room for one-sided actions in descriptions of partnerships that wish to be portrayed as transformative.

The above findings regarding how campus-community partnerships are represented in university communications should serve as a call to action. It would be prudent for all engaged universities to perform a similar analysis of their own communications and identify areas for improvement, but also areas of strength. Every university should reach out to its own community partners and ask how university communications can be improved. These conversations need to reach the highest level of the university and involve the public affairs office. There should be plans to regularly assess how reciprocity is being represented and identify areas of improvement. Finally, there should be a mechanism in place to regularly educate new communications professionals on the idea of reciprocity and how campus-community partnerships should be represented in communications.

Although the current study's findings reveal the challenges of communicating reciprocity in communications, it is difficult to generalize the results. The obvious limitation of the study is its sample size. A larger sample would allow for broader generalizations about the state of university public relations in terms of community engagement, as would selecting universities with more varied demographics. The study's design would also be improved if there were multiple reviewers instead of just one. The conclusions this study has made about reciprocity in communications would be bolstered by knowing that the partnerships in the communications were actually reciprocal; this could be accomplished through community partner surveys or more in-depth information from university partners involved in the partnerships.

There are areas of investigation that this study's scope did not allow but that would provide more insight into factors that affect university communications' treatment of community partners. At universities in which community engagement is deeply intertwined with campus ministry, is there more of a tendency than non-secular universities to frame service as charity? Similarly, is there a theme of paternalism in coverage of international projects, in which there is such a marked difference in culture, standard of living, and resources? Also, is there a point in time in which university communications change from non-reciprocal representations to reciprocal, such as after receipt of the Carnegie engagement classification or the introduction of a new college mission statement honoring engagement?

Future studies could examine how communications are handled across engaged universities. Are communications usually handled by public affairs or engagement offices? Are there attempts to educate whoever is in charge about reciprocity? How is this accomplished? What are best practices for educating public affairs offices? Insight into campus-community relationships may also be gleaned through occasions in which communications have affected

partnerships. Have community engagement offices experienced repercussions from non-reciprocal representations in media? What are some of the common issues? How have they been resolved?

Finally, in reference to the most significant limitation of the current study as well as the most important area for future research, study of this matter and the development of best practices must involve community partners. The reciprocity indicators in this study were based on best practices for community partnerships, developed with input from community partners over the past twenty years. Partnership principles are different from communication principles, however, and it is important to develop a different set of guidelines to ensure university communications regarding partnerships are reciprocal. Community partners must be involved in this process. Much can be gleaned from their answers to some of the same questions mentioned above: Have community partners experienced repercussions from non-reciprocal representations in university communications? How do non-reciprocal representations affect their willingness to partner with the university? What are some of the common issues? How have they been resolved? Community partners will be the experts on how universities can make university resources more available on their websites. They will know best how they want their identities represented in communications.

Community partners will be an essential part of developing recommendations for how university communications regarding partnerships can be reciprocal, and this is the next step in this area of study. Based on the findings of this study, a guide to best practices for university communication professionals at minimum should include instructions to:

1. Include information on how the partnership was beneficial to all parties.
2. Credit community partners for their contributions to the partnership.



3. Imagine all aspects of the project as a joint effort, and represent it as such.

Until a more comprehensive set of guidelines, developed collaboratively by university and community partners, is developed, care should be taken to avoid misrepresentation of campus-community partnerships, such as omitting partner identity, neglecting descriptions of mutual benefits, and using non-collaborative language.

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### Partnerships

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