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UNO Community Engagement Landscape Analysis (11.2.16)

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Deborah Smith-Howell, Anthony Starke and Keristiena Shenouda | November, 2016

University of Nebraska Omaha

Executive Summary

The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) is a nationally recognized engaged institution that wishes to expand the quantity and quality of its partnerships and outreach through its community engagement activities. Additionally, the University wants to assess, measure and evaluate the outcomes, impacts, and quality of its community engagement. This report presents findings from a landscape analysis which was conducted by the Office of Academic Affairs with the purpose of gaining more knowledge about current activities and practices in order to inform future data collection, analysis and measurement techniques. Additionally, the landscape analysis aims to comprehend how community engagement is institutionalized at UNO.

Researchers conducted 28 semi-standardized interviews (see Appendices A and B) with 32 participants who were identified and selected with the use of purposive and snowball-sampling techniques. Participants included key UNO leaders, administrators, faculty and staff who are aware of the many community engagement initiatives at the University. In addition to interview responses, unit documents and websites were also used as data. The data were then analyzed using an inductive coding approach.

This report's findings are presented under four broad headings: participant analysis, definitions of engagement, the spectrum of engagement, and examination of existing data. The participant analysis indicates that within the sample there are five distinct groups of personnel: campus leadership, deans, coordinators, frontline implementers, and data technicians. Each group provides a unique perspective with regard to community engagement at UNO. The second section concludes that community engagement has various meanings across the University. This section also includes a detailed typology of the 15 themes and three domains of community engagement at UNO. The third section reconciles these findings to the broader literature on community engagement. Specifically, it asserts that the label "Community Engagement" refers to a spectrum of engagement wherein activities range from community service to *community engagement*[1]. This section also provides a discussion of the various dimensions of engagement that distinguish the variations of engagement along the spectrum. The fourth and final section offers a detailed examination of the existing community engagement data (incl. measures and indicators) in use, the various systems of data collection and analysis, and participant critiques and concerns about the aforementioned data and systems.

The recommendations and next steps sections offer specific strategies for remedying some of the issues presented in the findings section and advancing the goals of this study. These recommendations include: messaging for all audiences that acknowledges the spectrum of engagement; strategic and purpose-oriented data collection; the use of a data warehouse and a

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[1] Community engagement here refers to the Carnegie Foundation's technical definition of community engagement.

story library; coordinated reporting; and, the implementation of new rewards systems for faculty staff, and students.

Of note, UNO has an institutional framework (i.e., infrastructure, resources, external recognitions, campus culture, etc.) that has cultivated community engagement to this point. This report, its findings and its recommendations build on that existing framework. The report concludes with a summary of the limitations of this study and challenges for future research.

Contents

Office of Academic Affairs, 2015-16 Community Engagement Landscape Analysis

Rationale

As Nebraska's metropolitan university, the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) has a long-standing tradition of engaging with its community. UNO's mission highlights its desire to develop and maintain "significant relationships with our community" (University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2012). In order to actualize that vision, the campus leadership has established community engagement as a university-wide, strategic goal. Aligned with the Carnegie Foundation definition, community engagement is described as mutually beneficial "collaboration between the University and its local, regional, national and global communities for the exchange of knowledge and resources" (University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2012, p. 6).

Throughout the past decade, UNO has been lauded and nationally recognized for its community engagement. UNO was one of the original institutions to receive the Carnegie Foundation community engagement classification in 2006 and was reaffirmed as a Community Engaged institution in 2015. Additionally, in 2014 UNO was the recipient of the Presidential Award for the Economic Opportunity category of the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.

Furthermore, with the addition of the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center, and the expansion of the Service Learning Academy and the Office of Civic and Social Responsibility – it is believed that "UNO will significantly expand the quantity and quality of our partnership and outreach activities exemplifying the hallmark of metropolitan universities" (John Christensen, State of the University Address, October 6, 2010).

In recent years, higher education institutions across the United States have shifted their focus by stressing the importance of assessment of community engagement initiatives and measurement of their impact. While for some reporting purposes data has been collected on an ad hoc basis at UNO, relatively little is known about the full spectrum of community engagement activities. Similar to other higher education institutions, UNO faces difficulties in documenting and systematically gathering data about its community engagement activities. These are essential steps towards measuring the outcomes, impacts, and quality of community engagement. In an effort to advance the understanding of community engagement and how it is institutionalized on campus, the Office of Academic Affairs has conducted a landscape analysis.

The goals of this study are to:
- gain an understanding of how stakeholders perceive community engagement at UNO;
- identify perceived requirements of community engagement;
- identify data gaps in UNO's reporting mechanisms, and potential remedies;
- identify and consolidate reporting needs; and
- identify best practices in the measurement of community engagement activities.

Methodology

This research employs an intrinsic case study approach. Community engagement at the university level is best understood as an initiative, in that it is a university-wide goal in which each unit and sub-unit incorporates it into their operations as they see fit. Because the understanding of community engagement has inherent implications for community engagement data collection (Rosing, 2015), each unit's perspective must be considered in the development of a comprehensive, university-wide understanding of community engagement.

I. Participant Selection

A purposive sampling technique was used, which consisted of identifying key UNO leaders, administrators, faculty, and staff who are aware of the many community engagement initiatives. Participants were identified by the Office of Academic Affairs, which has considerable responsibility for supporting UNO's community engagement goals and is instrumental in collecting and reporting data for community engagement award applications. Some participants were chosen based on the institutional knowledge of the Academic Affairs staff who have worked with these individuals to collect community engagement data, while others were selected based on their job title, its associated tasks, and their administrative purview.

The study also included snowball sampling as a means of identifying additional participants. At the end of each interview, participants were asked to identify others whom they felt would be able to offer additional insights about their unit's community engagement activities. For instance, deans may have a general awareness of their college's community engagement activities but someone else may handle the day-to-day operations of that college's community engagement function. The difference in perspective from general oversight to daily operations provides a more comprehensive understanding of the units' community engagement definition and its methods of data collection. In this first phase, 28 interviews were conducted with 32 participants.

II. Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-standardized interviews were used to collect data. The interview protocol asked questions about the institutionalization of community engagement at UNO as well as traditional and nontraditional community engagement data collection. The protocol was approved by the Office of Academic Affairs and incorporated feedback from community engagement expert Barbara Holland, Ph.D. After pilot interviews, interview protocols were reevaluated and the questions were simplified. The list of questions is available in Appendices A and B. Each interview was conducted with two interviewers. Protocols were modified at the discretion of the interviewers based on their perceptions of time constraints and priority of research goals.

Interviews were conducted in either the participants' offices or at a location of their choosing. Immediately following each interview, the interviewers debriefed and discussed the concepts, themes and other points they felt were significant during the interview. Within forty-eight hours

of each interview, field notes were compiled into one cohesive document and both interviewers conducted initial readings.

The data was analyzed using an inductive coding approach. This process began with open coding, which Berg and Lune (2012) describe as holding interpretations and answers as "tentative at best" (p. 364) until the coding is completed and they are "present in the text or supported by it" (p. 365). The thematic coding process was iterative and resulted in axial coding wherein relationships were identified and connections were made between various codes. Multiple methods of data collection were used to ensure trustworthiness. This triangulation technique entails "using different methods as a check on one another" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 102). By using multiple interviewers, field notes, and document analysis, researchers attempted to mitigate the limitations of each method.

Findings & Observations

I. Participant Analysis

Within the sample of participants interviewed, there are five distinct groups of personnel: campus leadership, deans, coordinators, frontline implementers, and data technicians. The proceeding analysis will detail the distinctions among these groups and provide a synopsis of each group's contribution to this analysis. These synopses do not present themes that are mutually exclusive to each group but, rather, these themes were emphasized by, and most prevalent among, members of each group.

A. Campus Leadership

Campus leadership mostly consists of members of the Chancellor's Cabinet. These individuals provide leadership and general oversight for all campus divisions. The survey protocol was redacted for this group to accommodate time constraints. This group's perspective is most valuable as a comprehensive view of how the many units across campus work together to promote community engagement. Campus leadership wishes to use data to advance the University, making UNO the leader in community engagement. Many of these participants had an awareness of the quantitative data and the many audiences with a vested interest in the University and its activities (e.g., government, University, nonprofits, donors, business and industry, etc.). Still, these participants underscore the power of qualitative data. Their desire is to use qualitative and quantitative data to build a strong narrative about impact and to show the value of partnership.

B. Deans

This group of participants functions as the administrative leaders of colleges. Their offices work to align multiple department/schools, projects and/or programs with similar purposes or a common goal. Deans were most concerned with justifications for data collection. Specifically, these participants want to know: (a) why (for what purposes) data is being collected; and (b) who benefits from data collection. Many were cautious about moving forward with the collection of additional data. Their concerns included: overtaxing human resources, the inefficient use of existing data, and inquiries into what specific data needs are not being fulfilled.

Deans viewed community engagement data as relevant and essential means for decision-making. Often dealing with aggregate data from the various sub-units within their respective purview, these individuals provided examples of using unit reports to allocate resources and develop strategic plans. Most members of this group rely heavily on Digital Measures for systematic tracking of faculty productivity, whereas ad hoc data gathering is used to meet other needs such as annual and quarterly reports, marketing, fundraising, etc. Additionally, the gathering and sharing of engagement data at this level is beholden to specific requests for data related to engagement activities and outcomes. This is often due to most of their data existing in the form of sub-unit aggregates, rather than raw form.

C. Coordinators

Coordinators work in or across units to cultivate and manage partnerships with the external community. What distinguishes this group from others is that their primary focus is not the implementation of a specific project, but rather they emphasize the role they play in identifying, matching and supporting partnerships.

This group has a clearly defined domain or target audience (e.g., CEC building partners, the Latin/Latino Community, K-12, etc.). Their approach to community engagement is pragmatic and they ascribe a high level of value to working *with* partners. Coordinators serve as the matchmaker between needs and resources. Though they have a working knowledge of many of the projects, their contribution to this research's understanding of UNO's community engagement is that they fill the gap and build the bridges that connect the university to the community. Yet, it should be noted that no one coordinator has comprehensive knowledge of the community. Instead, each has knowledge of a subgroup within the community and their respective needs.

D. Frontline Implementers

This group of participants is responsible for the day-to-day oversight and operations of various projects and programs within a unit or division. Frontline Implementers were most familiar with community engagement as practice. These individuals were more focused on the implementation of community engagement as opposed to its conceptual nature. Most Frontline Implementers have a working definition of community engagement, which often aligns with their unit's activities. Their relationship to community engagement data also varies depending on their respective role(s) within their unit. Many are responsible for producing some kind of report and, though most of them do not manage their unit's data, they have knowledge of how data is collected and where it is stored as well as which requests for data are being made but, not for what purpose. These individuals also have an intimate understanding of how community engagement works; however, few, if any, have an understanding of community engagement outside of their unit. Frontline Implementers and Coordinators holds a great deal of knowledge of who our community partners are and what community engagement activities exist.

E. Data Technicians

Data technicians are group who perform a data management function within their respective unit. These individuals are responsible for some aspect of community engagement data collection, recording, and retrieval of information. Although very few of our participants (10%) are classified as data technicians, their input resulted in a better understanding of UNO's data collection within the broader context of community engagement. Furthermore, data technicians are experts in current community engagement data collection at UNO and future research should include a larger representation of this group. Data technicians have access to the raw data, as they are usually responsible for its collection and storage. Their perspective has the potential to offer insight into the process of data collection and the specific design of collection strategies[2].

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[2] The data technicians that were interviewed were primarily focused on collecting data for the internal use of their respective units. Therefore, variables, methods and analyses are not standardized. This current

II. Definitions of Community Engagement

Findings indicate that different units conceptualize community engagement differently. The following analysis will provide a typology of the major themes presented in the conceptualization of community engagement. The typology includes 15 themes which have been divided into three domains.

For some participants, community engagement has an internal focus, which highlights its features and aspects. More specifically, these participants view engagement as a tool for student development with surplus benefits to the community. Of primary concern is:
- encouraging students to become active and involved citizens;
- helping students to understand that what they do is about more than just their own achievement;
- consideration for how students are growing and learning and what skills they are developing; and
- ensuring that students have an awareness of what they are learning through those experiences.

The four themes within this domain of community engagement are: social interaction and involvement; social responsibility; belonging; and, meaningfulness and critical thinking.

Domain 1	Description
Social Interaction/ Involvement	When asked what to look for to determine whether students are engaged in a community, one participant replied: "They're meeting new people. They understand that they're helping the world in doing this" (Participant 18).
Social Responsibility	Social responsibility is best described as commitment to a group or cause outside of one's self. "It's not just about learning material and books and stuff, it's about learning how to exist in a much larger world where, hopefully, we are all working towards a greater good" (Participant 15).
Belonging[3]	"Community engagement is a sense of belonging. In some ways shared existence and also a sense of reason for that, like wanting to be with these other people… [Students] need to find a safe place to be in a community that will validate what they are doing, who they are becoming" (Participant 18).
Meaningfulness/ Critical Thinking	Engagement is an opportunity to make a contribution and develop an awareness of its impact. "It's about meaningful contributions to local and global communities" (Participant 23).

practice of using unstandardized data needs to be considered in the development of a meta-structure for university-wide community engagement measurement, assessment and evaluation.

[3] Emphasizes sense of place.

When asked to define and give examples of community engagement, some participants emphasize the driving forces behind engagement. These participants speak of the process of community engagement. In these instances, engagement is defined based on the conditions surrounding the activity, which include: responsiveness, facilitation, outreach, access and diversity.

Domain 2	Description
Responsiveness	Community engagement requires colleges and universities to be attentive to what is going on around them. It requires them to be receptive to community needs, then and only then can they assure that they remain relevant within a society. It also means recognizing that yesterday's, today's and tomorrow's goals may not be the same because those needs change. (Participants 5, 7, and 27)
Facilitation	"We provide a safe space that allows people to come together, express how they feel, generate new ideas and settle disagreements" (Participant 13).
Outreach	"Getting UNO students, faculty and staff to be involved outside in the community and what they are doing" (Participant 13). It involves educating others about what we are about, so they know, what we do, what we have to offer, and why it is important. (Participant 8)
Access	In order to be engaged, we need to make our campus open and available for the community to come in and work and collaborate. (Participants 11 and 13)
Diversity[4]/ Inclusion	"In order to solve community problems we need to draw and use a wide range of audiences and expertise" (Participant 11).

The third group focuses on the criteria for engagement. For this group, engagement is assessed based on an awareness of the product, its benefits and the process whereby it was created. Here, if the outcomes meet certain criteria, then the activity is considered community engagement.

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[4] Emphasis placed on people.

Office of Academic Affairs, 2015-16 Community Engagement Landscape Analysis

Domain 3	Description
Reciprocal/ Mutually Beneficial	"It's about both giving back to those who have given to us and providing a benefit for everyone." "It's doing work *with* rather than *to* or *for*." (Participants 2 and 28).
Partnership	"I think engagement is successful when everybody feels like they are included – and actually bring things to the table when we initiate efforts and stuff… So for us engagement is really defined by a very active role of the partners" (Participant 16).
Collaboration[5]	"We have to constantly find new ways for different people and organizations to come together" (Participant 12).
Communication	This entails clarifying goals among all stakeholders (Participant 21).
Knowledge Development/Learning	Engagement should produce opportunities to apply knowledge and/or develop some new understanding of a phenomenon or its context.
Information and Resource Sharing	"Alignment of university resources and community needs" (Participant 26). This also entails making scholarship and research available. (Participant 9). "Bridging the gap between campus and community. It is about how to connect campus, research, resources, faculty, and staff to the community and vice versa" (Participant 12).

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[5] Emphasis on the mode or method of coming together.

III. The Spectrum of Engagement

Parallel to other higher education institutions, there is no uniformity to the conceptualization of the term 'community engagement' at the UNO. Scholarship related to community engagement reflects a dichotomous view in which 'community service' and 'community engagement' are considered two separate principles. At UNO, value is ascribed to both service and engagement. Service is considered as done *to* or *for* a community (partner), whereas engagement is aligned with the Carnegie Foundation's definition and is done *with* a community (partner).

An analysis of the data suggests moving into an understanding that the label '*Community Engagement*', as used in various institutional documents, refers to a spectrum which incorporates service on one end of the spectrum and community engagement (as defined by the Carnegie Foundation) on the other end of the spectrum. There is, therefore, a difference between the commonly-used label of community engagement and the technical definition of community engagement.

Community Engagement (label)

Community Service

Community Engagement
(technical definition)

By making this distinction explicit, the institution takes a more inclusive approach to the practice of community engagement, which reiterates the value for all service and engagement activities. Further, this nuanced understanding of community engagement provides the institution with an opportunity to engage in project design conversations which could move community service activities towards community engagement. Rather than taking a zero-sum approach, activities can fall anywhere on the community engagement spectrum and relatively simple project design changes would allow community service activities to move towards community engagement – which deriving from our findings, is the desired trend and outcome[6].

[6] Curricular engagement by nature is more aligned with the technical definition of community engagement. Interestingly, divisions that are traditionally more aligned with 'service', such as Athletics and Student Affairs, are taking intentional project design steps towards 'community engagement'. Examples are the intentional focus on reflections (Athletics) and co-curricular assessment (Student Affairs).

Community Engagement (label)

Community Service

Project Design/Process
(Opportunity)

Community Engagement
(technical definition)
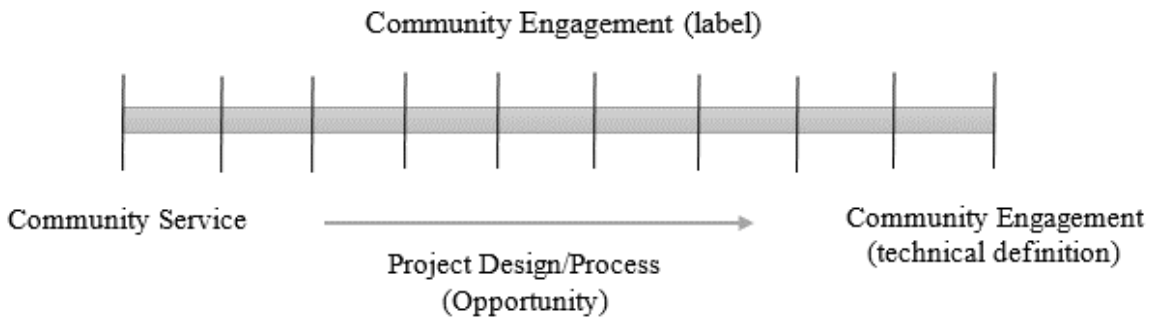
The community engagement spectrum is an aggregate-level depiction of various community engagement dimensions, including:

- Context (need)
- Knowledge (learning, reflection, exchange of information)
- Outcome (product, benefit, impact)
- Operation (transactional, space, resources)

These dimensions can be structured into a rubric in which each dimension is rated based on the extent it correlates to various levels of community engagement (technical) criteria. Further, these dimensions are important components in the project design of community engagement initiatives. In recognizing that the gains associated with the technical definition of community engagement are higher, the university can engage in conversations on how to make intentional changes in the process/project design that would allow the project to be elevated to engagement.

Community Engagement (label)

Community Engagement
(technical definition)

Project Design/Process
(Opportunity)

Gains

Community Service
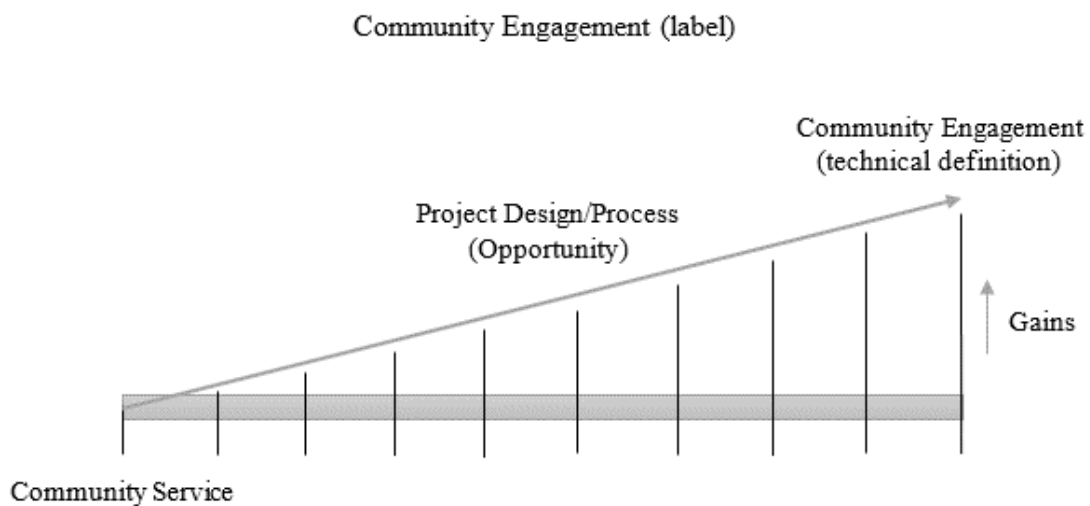
A. Project Design/Process

A crucial benefit in the proposed community engagement spectrum approach is the institution's ability to leverage project design and processes as mechanisms to elevate activities to higher levels of engagement. Analysis of the research data indicates that the existence of one or more external partner(s) is a criterion for the institution to engage in this process. For example, community service can be conducted without collaboration with an active external partner (e.g. donating food items to the Maverick Foodpantry).

Although the partnership does not need to be formalized, its existence is a prerequisite in the institution's ability to elevate service activities towards engagement. After all, the essence of community engagement (technical) lies in it being done *with* rather than *to* or *for* the community, which by definition forces the partner to play an active role in community engagement.

This increased level of collaboration with a community partner is an important component of the project/process design that can be leveraged to raise community service to community engagement. Alterations to the project design/process would have the following implications for the earlier identified rubric dimensions:

- Context (need)
  - To what extent is the need/problem/issue/project identified through mutual decision-making?
  - To what extent does the need/problem/issue/project reflect the diverse perspectives of the various partners?
- Knowledge (learning, reflection, exchange of information)
  - Are all partners active participants in knowledge production?
  - Is active reflection and learning occurring?
- Outcome (product, benefit, impact)
  - Are all stakeholders benefitting/impacted?
- Operation (transactional, space, resources)
  - Are all partners actively involved in the various aspects of the project?
  - To what extent are partners working together on the various aspects of the project?

IV. Existing Data Examination

One of the goals of this research was to identify the existence and location of community engagement data. Aligned with the organic nature of community engagement at UNO, data collection and analysis is decentralized. Individuals tasked with collecting data often function in 'silos' without a clear awareness of context and institution-wide needs.

A. Raw data v. Information/End-product

Throughout campus, community engagement information can be found in a wide-variety of reports[7]. An analysis of the research data highlights the importance of multi-purpose data use, which is why value should be placed on raw data rather than the aggregated information found in end-products.

In addition to the systems identified below, offices use ad-hoc spreadsheets, which contain usable raw data. The following table represents the sources of important data points.

Data Point	Source(s)
Courses	Service Learning Academy
	PeopleSoft – Service Learning flag
	Digital Measures – Service Learning flag
	Digital Measures – Engaged Taught Courses
	Digital Measures – Directed Student Learning
	WebFocus – Practicums and Teaching
Student Identifiers	BbA/PS (based on course enrollments)
	Digital Measures entries
	MavSYNC
	Athletics Spreadsheet
Faculty	Digital Measures
	Service Learning Academy
Hours	Curricular Engagement – Formula
	Service Learning Academy – Formula
	Athletics Spreadsheet – precise counts
	MavSYNC – self-reporting
CEC Reservations/Parking	EMS
Publications	Digital Measures
Workshops/Presentations	Digital Measures

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[7] For example: annual reports, donor reports, accreditation reports, internal rewards systems, grant applications, and marketing materials.

B. Systems Analysis

Several systems have been identified as valuable for collecting raw community engagement data. This section will discuss the limitations of each system as they pertain to community engagement data tracking.

Digital Measures

Digital Measures is the primary data gathering tool for faculty to enter community engagement data relating to teaching, scholarship and service. The data is used for faculty members' annual reports and in the Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure process. The following limitations were identified during this research:

- Definition/ambiguity of terms:
  - There is no unified, agreed-upon definition that provides faculty with clear guidelines on whether to enter activities in the teaching, scholarship, or service categories.
- Scope:
  - Up until recently, Digital Measures accounts only existed for faculty members, thus excluding staff from Digital Measures reporting.
- Faculty buy-in/low response rate:
  - The use of Digital Measures is connected with RPT. This has the following implications:
    - No incentive for faculty to enter the information if they are not on tenure-track lines.
    - No incentive for faculty to enter community engagement information if their respective departments do not consider community engagement as a positive component for RPT.
  - Entering data into Digital Measures is considered to be time consuming.
- Design:
  - Digital Measures pre-populates data (e.g., courses) and it is not intuitive for faculty to click on each course and provide additional information.
  - Many questions are optional and faculty can move forward without responding to most questions.
- Usability/Data optimization:
  - A common critique is that the output of Digital Measures data is not presented in the way faculty needed it.
    - This leads to faculty exporting a report and manually entering additional data into the Word document rather than the Digital Measures system.
  - Users' inability to retrieve group-level data (e.g., department or college-level data) limits the usability of Digital Measures.
- Self-reporting

MavSYNC

MavSYNC is a system which has the potential to capture students' community engagement participation as well as maintain information relating to student organizations and Weitz CEC building partners. The following limitations were identified during this research:

- Scope:
    - MavSYNC captures student information. There is a need/desire to capture participants outside of UNO like K-12 students and the public.
    - MavSYNC is also only capturing volunteering that occurred through UNO's facilitation. There is a need to capture students' volunteerism outside of UNO's realm.
- Operational:
    - There is limited understanding of MavSYNC
    - There is limited buy-in to the use of MavSYNC
- Reporting/Compatibility:
    - MavSYNC assigns a number to each student that is not aligned with the NU IDs[8].
- Self-reporting

Event Management System

EMS is a system used by the Weitz CEC to manage building reservations.

- Repurposing:
    - The purpose of EMS is to gather and manage building reservations. Attempts are being made to repurpose EMS in order to measure the impact of the Weitz CEC. Although EMS provides valuable information regarding the number of reservation, the data points are unreliable.
    - EMS is an operational system
    - EMS does not track collaboration/partnerships
- Self-reporting

C. Critiques of Existing Data

A major critique of current data collection and analysis practices is the absence of a clear understanding of the purpose of data sharing. This confusion breeds various concerns, which are discussed below, and result in a lack of buy-in regarding a comprehensive reporting system.

Context. Many participants expressed their concern with lack of guidance from campus leaders as to (a) what data is desired/useful, (b) the purposes of data, and (b) how data should be stored and shared. Some feel as though the current channels of data collection and reporting are not being used efficiently and effectively, while others believe that these existing channels are narrow in scope and fail to gather data they feel is relevant to community engagement reporting.

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[8] Although this was reported during an interview, independent examination of MavSYNC reporting does indicate the ability to capture NU IDs.

The latter note that they do not share their data until a request is made for that specific data set. Others in that same group often state that they do not know if their data is desirable or, when they feel it is, they do not know with whom or how it should be shared.

Return on Investment. Participants also stress the importance of recognizing data collection and reporting as time consuming and labor intensive tasks. When multiple requests are made for data, participants often question the legitimacy of the request. Additionally, they consider data utility to be a major motivation or deterrent in committing the additional energy and effort in collecting and reporting data. These participants question the functionality of existing data repositories and reports, specifically, inspecting its return on investment. That is, whether or not the finished product of each request is amenable to their needs and uses. These concerns about investments in data collection and reporting processes are influenced by two different sorts of data – existing and new – each soliciting a different critique. When referring to discussions regarding request for new data, participants' responses underscore the need for resource (re)allocation in order to fulfill those requests. On the other hand, when referring to discussions regarding the request for existing data, participants' responses emphasize a critique of data relevance (e.g., are the right questions being asked or are the questions that are being asked worth asking?).

Purpose/Benefit. Participants were also unable to make clear connections between data collection and the interests of their unit. They believe that costs associated with fulfilling data requests outweigh the benefits to their respective units. Furthermore, they assert that the information that is being collected does not answer the questions or meet the needs of their unit. Essentially, the perception is that there is a misalignment between institution and unit interests.

Unclear definitions. As mentioned in the above section on the spectrum of community engagement, engagement takes many forms. Often, exploratory and general requests for community engagement data causes participants to question whether or not their data falls within the scope of community engagement. For example, early on in this study, when interviewers asked about existing community engagement data, participants responded that they had no data. However, when asked for information regarding community engagement activities, those same units provided spreadsheets and other documentation. The lack of a clear operational definition of community engagement results in poor data quality and reporting. Moreover, this definition must be communicated to and understood by all units on campus.

Data Fragmentation. In order to answer some questions about community engagement, data must be compiled from multiple sources. As previously mentioned, one issue with using this fragmented data is that those various sources are unstandardized. Additionally, locating the various data points is often a difficult task. Whether it be that the request is being made to the wrong unit(s)/individual(s) or the wrong request is being made to the right unit, most requests for community engagement data is a search in the dark. While the inclination to believe that the data exists may be correct, the fact remains, there is no mechanism for mapping data.

Validity. Some data points lack construct validity. That is, the degree to which inferences can legitimately be made from operationalization of the construct. For instance, event management systems collect room reservation data, which is not a sufficient proxy for attendance. Reservations are not a good operationalization of engagement. Systems rely heavily on self-reporting and the individual is responsible for determining the nature of engagement. This practice is unreliable and decreases content validity because the operationalization of the construct is not clear or consistent across individuals. While not problematic in and of themselves, these data require a more nuanced treatment and given the desire to measure impact and evaluate outcomes, invalid data is not fit to answer those types of questions.

Data fatigue. Some participants argue that in its attempt to prevent discarding valuable data the institution is at risk of, "death by data". This response highlights the need for considering whether or not the data that are being collected and requested are worth collecting. Many participants believe that existing data collection tools and systems are capable of meeting existing needs, but believe these mechanisms are not used efficiently. Furthermore, the perceived inefficient and ineffective use of these systems breeds frustration because individuals believe they are being asked to report the same information multiple times using different platforms.

Threshold. Assessing the impact of community engagement on student learning was a common theme across groups of participants. Though this may be a priority for many units, the task is a difficult one in which many units do not have a clear plan for how to accomplish it. One challenge that needs to be addressed in future research is determining thresholds of engagement. The research design must not only account for the various compounding factors leading to student outcomes, but also must decipher among the levels of engagement.

Community engagement takes many forms and students participate in community engagement at varying levels; however, not all students are exposed to engagement in the same ways or at the same intensities. If measuring impact on students is to become a priority for the university, distinctions must be made as to how engaged a student must be in order to truly measure its impact on their trajectory. For example, some students are actively involved with service projects through student organizations as well as service learning courses, whereas others may occasionally participate in 60 minutes of service projects. Can it be said that both students are equally engaged? Is it fair to expect both students to have the same short- and/or long-term effects? Measurement requires precision and consensus in the operationalization of constructs and establishing these variables is a task that will require more consideration. To answer these questions, a discussion must be had as to scales of engagement and the weight of interventions. The aforementioned community engagement spectrum is equipped to serve as a catalyst for such a conversation.

Recommendations

I. Messaging of Community Engagement

Research participants have voiced the need for a 'campaign' to clarify community engagement concepts. Messaging should acknowledge the spectrum of community engagement and emphasize its inclusive nature (towards community service). It should also clarify important structures in place to facilitate engagement[9].

Further, the institution needs to make community engagement concrete. If it wishes to make the concept of community engagement understandable for the general public (or non-academics), it should move away from providing technical, theoretical definitions, and rather focus on providing examples that illustrate community engagement.

One question asked in the interviews is, "When do you know community engagement when you see it?" Messaging should include examples of community engagement in action. It is up to the Community Engagement Steering Committee to champion a more inclusive definition of community engagement and ensure that various units understand their function in achieving that idea.

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[9] The Community Engagement Center has become emblematic of community engagement at UNO, which makes a clear understanding of the function of the CEC important. Unlike theoretical and abstract constructions of community engagement, the CEC is a physical representation of the praxis of community engagement. Several research participants were puzzled by the function of the Community Engagement Center, which impacts participants' assessment of the CEC's success.

II. The UNO Community Engagement Story

Community engagement is a multifaceted and nuanced concept. Hence, any attempt to create one comprehensive institutional narrative of community engagement would be a hegemonic deed that vastly understates the nature and impact of community engagement at UNO. UNO has many variations of engagement, many audiences and many stories to tell. Community engagement at UNO is ever-evolving and for this reason the most accurate and all-encompassing story of engagement is simply that *UNO is community engagement*. In the following sections, we will provide a foundation for sharing exactly what community engagement means both *at* and *to* UNO. This will entail (a) a brief discussion of the institutional framework that has cultivated a breeding ground for engagement and (b) a suggested instrument for capturing and sharing the many manifestations of community engagement at UNO.

A. Institutional Framework

Institutional framework refers to components that illustrate UNO's institutional commitment to community engagement. It is the structure in place that allows units on campus to excel in community engagement. They include:

- Campus culture (e.g. community engagement is supported by UNO leadership but can be found throughout campus. The organic and decentralized nature of community engagement is a testament of its true integration in campus culture.)
- Infrastructure (e.g. Service Learning Academy, The Collaborative, the Weitz CEC)
- Resources (e.g. seed funding allowing students to create a service-oriented project)
- External recognitions (e.g. Carnegie Engaged institution)
- Prominence in institutional documents (e.g. mission statement, strategic plan, RPT guidelines)
- Accreditation (e.g. AQIP projects)

B. Story Library

We also recommend the development of a Story Library. The Story Library should contain stories recorded through various media, including print and video. The Story Library should also contain stories illustrating the diversity of community engagement (including service) as well as the various stakeholders involved. Accordingly, one could choose a story exemplifying community engagement that appeals to and conveniences a particular audience.

Further, there are often examples of community engagement described, without the label of community engagement being used. A story library could assist in helping UNO make an intentional effort to make these implicit acts of community engagement explicit.

III. Strategic Data Collection

UNO has a history of community engagement being an organic process, one that flows out of the unique relationships the faculty and staff have with its surrounding communities. Therefore, the goal when developing a data collection, measurement, analysis, and evaluation structure should be to design a system that is both organic and strategic.

A. Critical Assessment of Existing Data

The landscape analysis enhanced UNO's overall knowledge of community engagement data. It has allowed the university to re-examine existing data sources. It has also allowed UNO to map data sources which were believed to exist of which lacked concrete awareness. Further, the landscape analysis exposed the existence of data of which there was no prior knowledge.

Based on participants' responses, we need to reevaluate existing data sources before making any data requests. Participants often argue that data entered into systems are not used efficiently. They feel that university administration is choosing to make new requests rather than retrieving the data which has already been entered into the systems.

### B. The Logic of Community Engagement Data Collection

It is important to ask three specific questions:

1. What data points?
2. Why do you need these data?
3. How will the data be gathered?

Aligned with the organic nature of community engagement at UNO, data collection and analysis is decentralized. Individuals tasked with collecting data often function in 'silos' without a clear awareness of context and institution-wide needs. While some units collect data systematically to support specific office functionality, others collect data on an ad-hoc basis with a unit- or project-specific purpose (e.g., internal community service awards, course evaluation, etc.).

Analysis shows that the institution's current approach is to use existing data to formulate questions about community engagement. The approach is, "what data do we have and how do we use it?" which could result in data quality and data validity limitations.

We propose a more purpose-focused approach to community engagement data collection and analysis, guided by the 'what', 'why', and 'how' questions:

Why	What	How
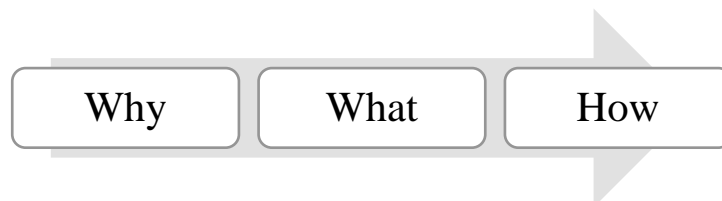
- **The 'Why' Question:** An analysis of the research data demonstrates 'data fatigue' at the dean's level. There is an assumption that the data that is currently being gathered is not used or is not used efficiently. More generally, research participants critique community engagement data requests as lacking specific purpose. Participants emphasized the need to make the purpose of data request explicit.

- **The 'What' Question:** A response to the 'Why' question should inform the 'What' question. Specifically, "What evidence would my audience find convincing?" For instance, if the purpose is to create a report about the impact of community engagement on students, an important follow-up question would be: "Who will be the audience of my report?" Responses to this question would allow one to identify the valid data points required to convince the audience of one's statements. The following audiences were identified as relevant to UNO:

  - UNO leadership
  - Central administration
  - Students (current and prospective)
  - Parents
  - Community and the public
  - Partners (including building partners)
  - Government (all levels)
  - Faculty
  - Other higher learning institutions
  - Donors
  - Business
  - Non-legal entities
  - Nonprofits

- **The 'How' Question:** Once the required data points are identified, the first action must be to leverage existing data systems to retrieve the data. If data points are identified that cannot be retrieved from existing data sources, any requests for new data should clearly communicate the purpose of the data, which will allow those who collect data to be more aware of the context their unit plays in institution-wide analysis.

C. Data Warehouse
We recommend to connecting different useful data sources with the data warehouse. This will allow for an increased usability of information. The focus of the conversation should be on what data sources are worth connecting and provide the highest level of collective benefit.

Various units on campus have different definitions of community engagement, which has implications for data analysis. Although the community engagement spectrum recognizes the

varying definitions and conceptualizations of community engagement, data gathered by various units reflects different types of activities and emphasizes different expected outcomes. This increases the necessity for well-defined and explicit acknowledgement of the measures in use. Given the current practice of decentralized data collection, difficulties in aggregating data across units occur. Specifically, attempts to aggregate various datasets could result in unreliable and invalid reporting. The use of the Data Cookbook to provide functional and technical definitions is therefore important.

Data fatigue and low response rates heighten the need for a system that allows data to be used for multiple purposes. Many individuals believe that the data entered is not used, while others argue that the data is useful but cannot be retrieved. Connecting useful data sources to a data warehouse will allow UNO to optimize its data usage. Firstly, various data sources will be connected to each other. For example, rather than only knowing what courses have a community engagement designation, users will be able to know who the students are that take these courses, the course sequence that led to students taking the course, etc. Secondly, the emphasis will be on raw data, which will allow multiple users to retrieve the data they need and report from it. The use of the Data Cookbook will mitigate any data reliability issues. Thus, connecting data to the data warehouse will increase the usability of data entered. Moreover, it is recommended to take an intentional step and inform stakeholders that data entered into these systems are being used.

D. Data Input
UNO needs to establish a schedule of which specific community engagement data requests are made or data is needed. This will allow various units to better coordinate their respective data collection timelines with institution-wide data reporting needs.

It is important to identify data points with an explicit focus. To realize this purpose-focused approach, campus leadership needs to make their data needs explicit (top-down approach) and those who collect data need to be aware of the context their unit plays in institution-wide analysis. Consequently, the data collected should align needs of all stakeholders.

In addition, participants have indicated the need for a data collection apparatus that allows offices and units to submit community engagement data at their convenience. Refer to Appendix C for an example.

E. Reward Systems
The low response rates, data fatigue, and the time-consuming nature of entering community engagement data, along with the feedback received from the research participants, indicated a lack of incentive for faculty and students to share community engagement information. Participants, therefore, strongly advocated for a reward system that incentivizes information sharing. Although specific ideas for rewards were shared, it is our recommendation that each group be consulted in the creation of a reward structure.

Next Steps

The creation of a community engagement measurement group, comprised of predominantly data technicians, is recommended to guide the following next steps.

A. Short-term
Short-term next steps are suggested actions that could be implemented immediately to help improve the institution's community engagement data collection and analysis infrastructure.

- *Schedule:* Drafting and disseminating a schedule of recurring community engagement data needs. As per the participant critique that data requests are often inconvenient and do not always align with the priorities of the unit, creating and sharing a campus-wide calendar of community engagement data needs can assist all units in planning to contribute to these institutional needs.

- *Data Input Form:* Drafting a form that allows individuals across campus to enter community engagement data at their convenience.

- *Calendar:* Creating a public calendar with all community engagement events open for the public. This will allow UNO to a) engage more individuals in engagement, and b) this calendar will provide UNO with a benchmark for data gathering.

B. Mid-range
Mid-range next steps are actions that require minimal investment over a three to six month period that could greatly inform and/or enhance community engagement practices at UNO.

- *Partnership Directory and Mapping*: Current data analysis and future research could be improved with more input from community partners. Unfortunately, due to the decentralized nature of community engagement, a comprehensive list of UNO's many community partners does not exist. Developing a mechanism for capturing and managing partner information could immensely improve community engagement data collection, measurement, analysis, and reporting. The partnerships should be categorized and mapped to illustrate the wide-range of partnerships UNO has. This partnership map will facilitate the understanding that there cannot be a single UNO community engagement story.

- *Model Analysis:* As has been previously mentioned, UNO is a decentralized institution. Attempts to conduct university-wide measurement, assessment, evaluation and research on community engagement requires a strategic and coordinate effort within and across the various units that comprise the university. Therefore, it is suggested that research be conducted to determine how other universities are centralizing and coordinating engagement research. A white paper that analyzes these various models will inform

decision-making regarding the creation of a university-wide community engagement data collection and reporting apparatus.

C. Long-term

Long-term next steps are suggested actions that may require considerable investments in time and resources. Nevertheless, they are believed to have great potential for achieving the aforementioned project goals.

- *Additional Research:* One of the major limitations of this study is that it fails to include the perspectives of many stakeholders. This study should be complemented with additional insights from others, including, but not limited to: students, faculty, donors, governmental employees, and community members/partners. Research tools such as interviews, focus groups and surveys can provide information not within the scope of this study's findings.

- *Rubric Development:* Once a comprehensive understanding of the various stakeholders' community engagement needs has been established, the community engagement spectrum rubric needs to be developed.

Challenges & Limitations

As with any research study, this study is not without its limitations. In this section, we will briefly discuss those limitations as well as challenges for future research.

A. Sample Bias

A major flaw of purposive selection is that it biases the participant sample. Although purposive sampling is desirable for this type of study, it limits the scope of perspectives. In particular, faculty, students, community and other stakeholders are not represented in these findings. Additionally, given the goals of this study, data technicians have extensive expertise; however, that group is vastly underrepresented in this sample. All of the technicians in this study were identified through snowball sampling. Thus, identifying other data technicians may be a challenge in future research.

B. Data Quality

When inconsistencies are exposed among various data sources, as is often the case with any dataset, these discrepancies must be reconciled. In the case of UNO's community engagement data reconciliation is difficult because there is no standard mechanism for weighing or valuing the competing sources. This lack of an authoritative source in these instances has the potential to lead to issues of data quality, data validity, and misinterpretation of data. In addition to the lack of an authoritative source, data quality is also weakened when there are issues of duplication and misinterpretation. The lack of coordinated efforts across units, and sometimes within units, results in data being double-counted or reported without proper context.

C. Data Type and Tracking

There appears to be a clear distinction between the types of data participants desire – that is, qualitative and quantitative. Participants placed value on qualitative data as it is believed to provide richer details and compelling narratives that quantitative data are incapable of delivering. A major challenge to developing a meta-structure of data collection is that qualitative data collection and analysis is much more cumbersome than quantitative data. The university is not equipped for ongoing qualitative data tracking. In order to conduct the desired measurements, new qualitative tracking methods need to be implemented.

D. Scope

This research has concluded that community engagement is a spectrum. Furthermore, the university has stated that it values both community service and community engagement. However, the literature on engagement has a very narrow scope, in which some aspects of the spectrum are not recognized as engagement.

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Appendices

A. Interview Protocol I

Institutionalization of Community Engagement

1. How does your unit both conceptualize and actualize community engagement?

   a. What does community engagement mean in your unit?

   b. What criteria do you use to identify engagement?

   c. Are there faculty, staff, or students in your unit that exemplify a commitment to community engagement?

2. Does the unit have adequate infrastructure to support community engagement? Please explain.

3. In your day-to-day operations, is community engagement part of your unit?

   a. Are the unit's faculty/staff and students active and visible in community educational, civic, and cultural life?

   b. Is it based on the discretion of the faculty member?

   c. To what extent is the unit's leadership encouraging the addition of a community engagement component?

   d. To what extent is this reflected in your unit's mission/vision?

4. Are there incentives and rewards that support faculty/staff in community engagement?

   a. Is the ability to lead in the community engagement arena a criteria for the selection and evaluation of unit leaders, considered in tenure and promotion decisions, faculty/staff recruitment and/or staff evaluations?

5. Is community engagement built into the curriculum?

   a. If so, in what ways?

   b. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of curricular-based community engagement?

   c. Are there courses that regularly/always include a community experience (e.g., practicum, internship, capstone, etc.)?

Community Engagement Traditional and Untraditional Data Collection

1. What types of community engagement activities are your students and faculty undertaking?

2. Does your unit keep track of these activities?

   a. If yes, what types of information are you gathering?

   b. How is it being recorded?

   c. Is this information gathered on an ad hoc/sporadic basis or is it more regular/systematic?

3. How, or in what ways, is your unit using this information?

4. Is there a need for types of information that you currently do not have?

   a. In what ways would you use this information?

   b. Do you have any suggestions as to where we should begin to start collecting this information?

5. Is community engagement a component of your unit's research agenda?

6. What information do you think others are gathering, that might be relevant for our research?

7. In what ways can the Office of Academic Affairs improve sharing or highlighting your unit's community engagement?
   a. How can we go about making sure that the Office of Academic Affairs is aware of this information?

Final Question

8. Is there anyone else that you would suggest we talk to, in order to gain a better understanding of your unit's community engagement activities?

 Demographic Information

Primary discipline:_____

Years in the field:_____

Years at UNO:_____

Positions held at UNO:_____

_____

_____

B. Interview Protocol II (Amended)

Part I: Institutionalization of Community Engagement

1. How does your unit both conceptualize and actualize community engagement?

    a. What does community engagement mean in your unit?

    b. To what extent is this reflected in your unit's mission/vision?

    c. What criteria do you use to identify engagement?

    d. Are there faculty, staff, or students in your unit that exemplify a commitment to community engagement?

2. Does the unit have adequate infrastructure to support community engagement? Please explain.

3. Are there incentives and rewards that support faculty in community engagement?

    a. Is the ability to lead in the community engagement arena a criteria for the selection and evaluation of unit leaders, considered in tenure and promotion decisions, faculty/staff recruitment and/or staff evaluations?

4. Is community engagement built into the curriculum?

    a. Are there courses that regularly/always include a community experience (e.g., practicum, internship, capstone, etc.)?

5. In your day-to-day operations, is community engagement part of your unit?

    a. Are the unit's faculty/staff and students active and visible in the community's educational, civic, and cultural life?

    b. Is it based on the discretion of the faculty member?

    c. To what extent is the unit's leadership encouraging the addition of a community engagement component?

Office of Academic Affairs, 2015-16 Community Engagement Landscape Analysis

Part II: Community Engagement Traditional and Untraditional Data Collection

9. What types of community engagement activities are your students and faculty undertaking?

10. Does your unit keep track of these activities?

   a. If yes, what types of information are you gathering?

   b. How is it being recorded?

   c. Is this information gathered on an ad hoc/sporadic basis or is it more regular/systematic.

11. What types/specific reports are you generated based on this information?

   a. What do you do with these reports – what is their purpose?

   b. Are there specific reports or types of report you want to generate, that you are currently unable to generate?

      i. What type of information would you need

      ii. Suggestions as to where we should begin to start collecting this information?

12. What information do you think others are gathering, that might be relevant for our research?

13. In what ways can the Office of Academic Affairs improve sharing or highlighting your unit's community engagement?

   a. How can we go about making sure that the Office of Academic Affairs is aware of this information?

Final Question

14. Is there anyone else that you would suggest we talk to, in order to gain a better understanding of your unit's community engagement activities?

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C. Community Engagement Tracking Form