Place, Purpose, and Praxis:
The Identities and Experiences of
Community-Engaged Faculty

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Emily Janke, Ph.D.  University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Erica Wrencher, MA University of North Carolina at Greensboro
*Hillary Goodner, MS University of Minnesota
*Tania D. Mitchell, Ed.D. University of Minnesota
Elaine Ward, Ed.D. Merrimack College
Michael Hemphill, Ph.D University of North Carolina at Greensboro

*presenters
Background

Community engagement as an institutional strategy for organizational identity (e.g., Furco et al., 2022; Whetten, 2006)

Community Engaged Scholarship as a practice with an impactful role in diversity, equity, and inclusion both for students and faculty (e.g., Salvador, 2017; Vogelgesang et al., 2010)

Institutional embrace of community engagement attracts a more diverse, equity minded, faculty believing their commitments to public forms of scholarship will be supported (e.g., Post et al., 2016; Ward, 2010)
The Site: University of North Carolina at Greensboro

MISSION & VISION
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro will redefine the public research university for the 21st century as an inclusive, collaborative, and responsive institution making a difference in the lives of students and the communities it serves.
Participants

21 faculty who self-identified as community engaged scholars

- in their first six years at UNCG
- Represented disciplines
  - Business & Economics (n=2)
  - Arts & Sciences (n = 3; all Academic Professional Track)
  - Visual and Performing Arts (n=5; all Tenure Track)
  - Health and Human Sciences (n=6)
  - Nursing (n=2; all Academic Professional Track)
  - Education (n=3; all Tenure Track)

- Represented tracks:
  - 66% were Tenure Track (n=14)
  - 33% were Academic Professional Track (n=7)
Conceptual Framework

adapted from Ward, 2010; Colbeck & Michael, 2006; Eckel et al., 1998
Methodology

single site case study

verbatim transcripts of individual interviews
  average length 55 minutes

interpretive phenomenological analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2017)
  dialogical approach amongst the research team
  inductive coding (using NVivo)
  memoing
Research Question

As faculty shape their scholarly identities in a new academic home, how are they making sense of their community-engaged identities in relation to the organization's context and culture?

• faculty members' motivations for community-engaged scholarship
• decisions to join a community-engaged institution
• experiences of (mis)alignment with institutional policies and practices designed to support community-engaged scholarship
Findings

Individual motivations for community engagement as shaped by family & early childhood experiences

“I have a history of activism that I directly traced to my mom. So my mom marched with Cesar Chavez in the 60s and 70s. She instilled in me and role modeled to me protests and demonstrations and the importance of voting and of trying to participate in community meetings and parent teacher organizations and those kinds of things from a very young age.” (Laura)
Findings

Sense of Individual Alignment to Institution - Prior to Employment

“So I remember, and it was the easiest interview I ever had because it was like, it was so natural. But I remember telling the committee, I see that you have this project space downtown, which is a UNCG art space that is public facing in the community . . . it seems like your interest is in taking art to the people where they are and letting artists and students have the freedom to do, to experiment with being, not just artists or historians, but doing that in public and doing that with their own communities, if they're from here. And I remember thinking like, those are exactly my values. Like I was seeing my values in the website, in the conversations I was having.” (Laura)
Findings

Sense of Individual Alignment to Institution - Once Employed

“I think all the smaller pieces of infrastructure I didn't see until I got to the position. And so I'm seeing it a lot now. And I would say a function of what I'm seeing in my day to day interactions with my colleagues in my department, what I see in my academic unit, and at the school of education level. And then what I also think, and this is what was even more instrumental, right, was seeing the other offices that are doing real authentic community partnerships. That is the kind of work that I'm not only surrounded by, but that I embrace. And so that's what I would say, where I started to get the sense that this is where I really feel empowered by the community-engaged scholarship – that's here.” (Brian)
Findings

Sense of Individual (Mis)alignment to Institution - Once Employed

“I think with the budget cuts, people get pushed into a self preservation mode and that makes us less outward focused and looking at how we can be of service to the community is how I would summarize it in each other. So that, which is sad. Cause that's when we need each other most.” (Dan)
Discussion

Study provides insight into the extent that faculty CE identity relates to their decisions for employment.

Data shows how faculty react to institutional messaging around community engagement.

Departmental context impacts faculty experiences and alignment with the institution.

Financial matters challenge faculty alignment and commitment.
Conclusion

Universities’ recognition and promotion of community engagement can be influential for prospective faculty.

How universities walk their talk matter—faculty need to see alignment between institutional pronouncements and policies and practices (at all levels of the institution).

How do CE faculty at institutions without the branding, resources or institutional commitments to community engagement sustain their praxis?
References


