

# Reshaping Institutional Boundaries to Accommodate an Engagement Agenda

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**Abstract** Key voices influencing higher education are increasingly aware of engagement in effecting change. Public research universities have missions compatible with engagement, but efforts to institutionalize it may conflict with their underlying values. Using boundary expansion as the analytical framework, this study compared the institutionalization of engagement at two types of public research universities. Land-grant universities implement engagement primarily through outreach and extension in specialized units. At urban or metropolitan universities, engagement is more often a university-wide agenda, impacting teaching, research, and partnerships. The difference between the two approaches can be explained by examining institutional capacity for boundary reshaping and expansion.

**Key words** engagement · outreach · boundary reshaping · organizational development

## National Progress Toward Engagement

There is a national movement to strengthen higher education's commitment to public purposes. Over the last 20 years, forums, declarations, and new forms of scholarship have

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prodded institutions to take on public work in new ways (e.g., Boyer 1990, 1996; Duderstadt 2000; Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities 1999; Newman and Scurry 2001), and higher education leaders have used the term “engagement” to describe a renewed relationship between higher education and the public it serves. Today, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching defines community engagement as “the collaboration between higher education institutions 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” (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2007a). Similarly, an engaged university is defined as one “fully committed to direct, two-way interaction with communities and other external constituencies through the development, exchange, and application of knowledge, information, and expertise for mutual benefit” (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, [AASCU] 2002, p. 7).

Progress toward public engagement as defined by the Carnegie Foundation and AASCU has drawn diverse reactions across higher education. As noted in a Wingspread 2004 statement, “...engagement has not become the defining characteristic of higher education’s mission nor has it been embraced across disciplines, departments and institutions” (Brukardt et al. 2004, p. ii). Yet, in the fall of 2006, 76 institutions, representing both public and private postsecondary institutions of many types, were awarded community engagement classification status by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2007b), having provided evidence of substantial activity in student–community learning environments, community–campus partnership, engaged scholarship, and institutional policies and procedures in support of engagement.

So, what does engagement look like at “engaged” institutions? Why do certain institutions or parts of institutions embrace engagement while others struggle? What circumstances, changes, or strategies are associated with an institution’s capacity to adopt, implement, and sustain engagement? What forces seem to foster or inhibit an organization’s interest in or capacity for engagement? What is real commitment and what is public relations puffery? How is engagement integrated into the academic culture? Exploring these questions is intended to enhance both the understanding and practice of higher education’s serving the public good.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

Through this study we examined institutions that have adopted a public engagement agenda, including their pathways to expressing this agenda. The main focus was understanding how institutional boundaries change to accommodate engagement. The research questions pursued were:

- How is the engagement agenda adopted and reflected in institutional practice at public research universities?
- In what ways have institutional boundaries expanded or been reshaped to accommodate this agenda?
- How and to what extent is engagement being institutionalized at public research universities that espouse an engagement agenda?

Informed by the Carnegie Foundation’s definition of engagement, as articulated above, we examined how institutions conceptualize, define, and enact their public roles based on history, mission, and place.

## Conceptual Framework

Colleges and universities that adopt an engagement agenda undergo significant cultural and structural changes as they redefine relationships and expectations of internal and external partners. We analyzed these changes with the framework of the organizational change model proposed by Arthur Levine (1980) in *Why Innovation Fails: The Institutionalization and Termination of Innovation in Higher Education* and as the model was more recently used by Holland (2005). Levine's research, like ours, focused on colleges and universities as complex organizations in order to investigate similar constructs of innovation and institutionalization. As Holland (2005) wrote, "Levine offers a way to analyze data across many cases and recognize patterns of organizational behavior that may explain differences in institutional responses to innovative ideas" (p. 238). For our study we used the building blocks of Levine's theory—boundary expansion and boundary contraction—to define how institutions have accommodated engagement.

In 1966, Erikson described boundaries as a "symbolic set of parentheses" which control an organization's social space in order to retain "a limited range of activities and a given pattern of constancy and stability within the larger environment" (Erikson 1966, p. 10). Likewise, we apply the term *boundary* to organizationally defined limits or bounds, the specific characteristics of which Levine described. Levine began his analysis by pointing out that organizations possess unique personalities that are shaped by a distinctive set of norms, values, and goals. Norms refer to ways that organizational participants interact—through communication, rules, and patterns of authority. Values constitute the commonly held beliefs among organizational members. Finally, goals signify the commonly accepted future directions for the organization. Boundary establishment is one of the tools through which organizations guard against external forces that may violate these commonly held norms, values, and goals (Levine 1980).

Organizational boundaries are evident at colleges and universities, especially research intensive institutions. Historically, scholarly inquiry at research universities has been embedded in traditional scientific methodology, in which knowledge is regarded as a commodity produced by researchers and then transferred to a user (National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research 1996). Through firm structural and cultural boundaries, these institutions maintain their historical roles as gatekeepers and disseminators of knowledge. Traditional promotion, tenure, and research protocols protect academic culture and ultimately discourage university faculty members from getting involved with community-based work (Dickson et al. 1985). Thus university research has historically been designed narrowly, with community partners acting as passive participants rather than as partners in discovery (Corrigan 2000). Overall, the values of reciprocity expressed through engagement are largely incompatible with this traditional research culture.

Given this background, what leads institutions to expand their boundaries and adopt an agenda of engagement? According to Levine (1980), environmental conditions reshape boundaries to accommodate new ways of thinking and acting. Specifically, Levine noted that innovation occurs when "environmental change makes existing boundaries unworkable, when the organization fails to achieve desired goals, or when it is thought that goals can be better satisfied in another matter" (p. 12).

Levine's analysis is instructive in understanding the progress of the engagement movement in higher education. For example, institutions' perceived failure to meet their civic obligations contributed to the advancement of engagement as an innovation. In some circles engagement is viewed as essential to ensuring the survival of public higher education (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities 1999;

National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good 2006). In addition, there is evidence that the one-way model of knowledge creation and dissemination lacks efficacy because it fails to consider the motivations and contexts of the intended recipients (Berman and McLaughlin 1978). Hence, two-way knowledge flow has emerged as a compelling method to foster learning and bring about systemic changes in communities. The drive to fulfill civic obligations and the need to practice two-way knowledge flow has led to changes in the relationship between the innovation of engagement and traditional academic norms in institutions across the United States. In this process, the extent of organizational boundary expansion depends on the extent to which engagement can be made compatible with the norms, values, and goals of the host institution.

Levine (1980) suggested that boundary expansion occurs when an organization legitimizes differences between itself and the innovation and agrees to absorb some of these differences. Organizations express boundary expansion through diffusion or enclaving. In *diffusion*, the institution widely adopts the innovation; it may even become so dispersed and integrated into ongoing operations that it disappears. In *enclaving*, an organization limits the scope of an innovation. That is, the innovation does not permeate the institution, but is confined to an established and recognizable home within it.

In this context, the determiners of diffusion or enclaving of an innovation are compatibility and profitability (Levine 1980). *Compatibility* refers to the degree to which an innovation's norms, values, and goals are congruent with those of the host organization. *Profitability* reflects the extent to which the innovation satisfies an adopter's need better than existing mechanisms. In other words, if the innovation has value to the organization generally, or to organizational actors individually, it possesses elements of profitability.

Levine (1980) further separated the concept of profitability into two categories: *general profitability* and *self-interest profitability*. When the innovation is generally profitable, it holds value for the organization as a whole. Generally profitable innovations are likely to be adopted as enclaves to serve the overall goals of the organization. Alternatively, self-interest profitability suggests that individuals in the organization personally benefit from the innovation and are thus likely to adopt it. Innovations with self-interest profitability are more likely to be diffused since they yield personal benefits for members throughout the organization.

Whether engagement will be adopted via diffusion or an enclaved organizational structure depends on how it reflects the value system of the institution as a whole or the individuals within it. Diffusion will likely occur in settings that provide personal rewards for faculty and staff involved in engagement. For example, the degree to which grant support, recognition, and promotion and tenure accrue to faculty members involved in engagement will determine its self-profitability. These personal motivators can yield widespread (diffused) institutional movement toward engagement. However, if engagement is thought to benefit the campus as a whole rather than individuals, special structures may be established to achieve more comprehensive goals. For example, engagement may yield enhanced teaching and learning opportunities or a boost in campus public relations—benefits that accrue to the institution at large. In this case, a separate structure (enclaving) can carry out the duties of engagement without transforming the entire system of actors who do not personally profit from it.

Levine (1980) argued that, if the conditions of compatibility and profitability are not satisfied, boundary expansion can occur but with the innovation modified to adhere to institutional compatibility and profitability. However, if the innovation does not satisfy organizational norms, boundaries will contract and the innovation will be terminated. Table I provides a summary illustration of these concepts.

**Table 1** Levine’s (1980) Model of Boundary Expansion or Contraction of an Innovation

	Boundary expansion: Accept the innovation	Boundary contraction: Reject the innovation
Compatibility	Innovation is compatible with mission, norms, etc.	Innovation is incompatible with mission, etc.
Profitability	Innovation is profitable to individuals or institution as a whole.	Innovation is not profitable to individuals or the institution.
Profitability—Self-interest	Innovation provides value to individuals who adopt it. Results in diffusion: Innovation permeates entire institution and becomes part of daily practice.	
Profitability—General	Innovation provides value to institution as a whole. Results in enclaving: Innovation is housed in separate unit and regarded as a symbolic commitment to innovation.	

Levine’s (1980) model may be difficult to visualize without a concrete application. Thus, we offer the example of the diversity movement in higher education to illustrate the concepts of boundary expansion, diffusion, enclaving, general profitability, and self-interest profitability. This example aims to provide insight into how boundary expansion might be understood in our analysis of public engagement.

We observe that today’s emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism in higher education arose because of past failures to achieve desired national goals of equal opportunity. During the 1960s and 1970s, environmental forces such as the Civil Rights Act and other political and social movements—inside and outside the academy—compelled institutions to adopt more inclusive practices in admissions, hiring, student services, and curricula. On many campuses, institutional boundaries expanded to accommodate diversity because it was perceived to be generally profitable. That is, promoting diversity on campus positioned institutions to address societal pressures and changing societal norms regarding equal opportunity. Due to its general profitability, institutions typically enclaved diversity by creating isolated units to “provide a home” for it. For example, offices of affirmative action were developed to promote hiring of diverse faculty and staff; and offices of multicultural affairs were set up to promote more diverse student programming. These offices were established because creating equal opportunity for underrepresented groups was perceived as profitable for the institution as a whole.

Some campuses adopted diversity *via* diffusion because many faculty and staff members viewed the diversity movement as self-profitable. That is, individuals considered diversity of ideas, student backgrounds, and ways of thinking to be critical elements in building high quality teaching and learning programs (Haworth and Conrad 1997). Thus diversity was diffused through institutional curricular reforms designed to promote student learning gains and enhance faculty portfolios.

This example illustrates that enclaving and diffusion are not mutually exclusive. Some institutions adopting a diversity agenda diffused this innovation through the curricula and enclaved it via departments of affirmative action and multicultural affairs. The innovation of diversity was embraced by many institutions across the country because it became fully compatible with institutional norms, values, and goals.

In the following sections of this article we examine these concepts through the lens of public engagement. We offer consideration of how Levine’s model helped us answer our

research questions and understand how engagement is being adopted and reflected in institutional practice at public research universities. We will do so by drawing from his model in the analysis of our data through further questions. To what degree, and how, is engagement profitable to the institution? Based on the type of profitability (general or self-interest), how is engagement expressed at public research institutions? The following section outlines how we addressed these questions.

## Methodology

We employed the qualitative methodology as outlined by Yin (2001) to address our research questions through a purposefully selected multicase study of six public research-extensive universities located in three states: three land-grant institutions and three urban research universities. A multicase study design was selected in order to examine and compare patterns of emerging engagement across research-oriented institutions. We decided that six cases was a number that would prove manageable while providing a robust set of data to formulate conclusions across institutions.

### Site Selection

These six study cases were located in a southern state, a Great Lakes state, and a midwestern state. The land-grant institutions in this study were established in the 18th and 19th centuries. The urban universities were established in the 20th century, one as recently as the 1980s. Total student enrollments across all institutions range from over 25,000 to 40,000 students. Full-time faculty members at these institutions number from 750 to 3,000. Additionally, the amount of research dollars reported by these institutions in 2005 ranged from nearly \$45 million to \$700 million. The urban research institutions in this study are Carnegie classified research intensive or extensive universities located in the heart of cities with surrounding metropolitan areas exceeding 1,000,000 people. Two of the land-grant institutions in our sample are located in rural areas with surrounding populations under 150,000. The third land-grant institution is in a medium-size city with its surrounding population not exceeding 250,000. Land-grant and urban public research institutions were selected for two reasons. First, we recognize that institutions vary in their capacity and inclination for engagement. This belief is founded on Holland's (2005) work that suggested institutions demonstrate commitment to engagement by "adopting the notions of civic engagement and engaged scholarship according to the relevance of those concepts to their particular institutional mission and capacity" (p. 242). By focusing on land-grant and urban research universities, we created a comparison of the unfolding public engagement agendas in research-oriented institutions with similar missions. At the same time, studying two types of research institutions (urban and land-grant) allowed us to examine the impact of "place" and other factors that distinguish among various forms of engagement.

Second, we selected institutions with an established history and strong reputation for supporting outreach and engagement activities in order to ensure the availability of informed internal and external perspectives regarding the practices and evolution of engagement activities on these campuses: that is, institutions that provided clear evidence of boundary expansion. Selecting institutions that explicitly are "working toward" or "espouse" engagement ensured richness of perspectives in response to our research questions. We identified these sites through informal discussions with national engagement leaders who provided their perspectives on research institutions that fit this category. These leaders

repeatedly suggested a small number of institutions. From this group, our study cases were identified through a two-part process. We analyzed websites, presidential speeches, and engagement activities on these campuses to verify the appropriateness of these sites for our study. Because we were interested in how institutions differentiate themselves in the context of engagement, we purposefully paired and examined land-grant and research universities located in the same state (three land-grant institutions and three urban institutions in three states).

Finally, it is important to note the limitations of selecting a sample of engaged institutions from among decentralized and loosely controlled or loosely coupled organizations like research universities. In loosely coupled systems (see Birnbaum 1988; Weick 1976), campus actors may forge two-way relationships with communities independent of campus executives' knowledge and support; that is, individual faculty members, departments, or other small centers or units may take steps toward engagement without the knowledge of the campus president or provost. Consequently, aspects of the institution may actually be "engaged" absent formal, institution-level steps toward institutionalizing engagement. Similarly, a collection of campus units may remain disengaged while the institution itself approaches engagement via strategic and symbolic steps, such as establishing faculty roles and rewards so as to recognize the importance of engagement, creating internal grant programs, and including engagement language in strategic plans. Thus broad statements about loosely coupled organizations may reflect only selected aspects of campus involvement in engagement.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews and document review were the primary methods of data collection. A strategy involving three tiers of interviews within an institution was employed. On each campus we interviewed the provost and those persons who oversee outreach and engagement programs (vice presidents), leaders of engagement programs, and community leaders involved as partners in these engagement efforts. The number of individual interviews per campus ranged from nine to 18, with a total of 80 interviews conducted. Interviews were typically 1–2 hours in length.

In Phase 1 of our interviews, we interviewed the persons identified to get a sense of how outreach and engagement was conceptualized and practiced on their campuses. The interviewees shed light on efforts that were typical of their institution's work with community partners. Using the snowball sampling technique (Merriam 1998), we asked these leaders to provide names of campus engagement leaders to interview in Phase 2.

In Phase 2 of our study, we interviewed leaders of campus engagement initiatives (center directors, program directors, faculty and staff leaders) to gain their perspective on how knowledge is exchanged with their targeted constituencies. Again, using snowball sampling, these campus leaders were asked to provide names and contact information for three to six community partners who could be interviewed in Phase 3 of the study.

In Phase 3, we interviewed community partners involved with engagement initiatives in order to gain their perspective on issues of engagement. Specifically, we inquired about how knowledge was shared among community and university partners. Table II provides a breakdown of the number of interviews by institution and stakeholder group. The Institutional Research Boards of both researchers' universities provided human subject research approval for this research.

Finally, we collected relevant documents such as mission statements, institutional reports, newsletters, and web pages that informed our study of engagement within the six institutions. Interview questions and issues explored during data collection were

**Table II** Interviews by Campus and Stakeholder Group

	Phase 1: Campus executives (provost, senior outreach executives)	Phase 2: Faculty and staff leaders of engagement initiatives	Phase 3: Community partners affiliated with engagement initiatives	Total
Land-grant institutions				
Southern State University (SSU)	3	4	8	15
Great Lakes State University (GLSU)	3	6	9	18
Midwest State University (MSU)	2	5	7	14
Urban research institutions				
Southern Urban University (SUU)	3	2	4	9
Lake City University (LCU)	2	3	6	11
Midwest Metro University (MMU)	2	4	7	13
Total interviews				80

adapted from Holland's (2006) matrix of levels of institutional commitment to engagement; these issues included factors such as history and mission; administrator, faculty, staff, and student involvement in engagement; curricula; promotion, tenure, and hiring practices; funding and resource allocation; and external communications. Collecting data on these factors helped us understand the extent to which engagement was moving toward enclaving or diffusion. Major community–campus partnerships were used as key indicators of public engagement. Institutional leaders identified these partnerships as high-profile initiatives that were recognized as strategic (aligned with current organizational priorities), large-scale (involving a significant number of faculty and students), and institutionally or grant funded.

The coding measures used in this study enabled our use of the constant comparison method of analyzing the themes within cases and across cases and case types (Yin 2001). First, we searched our initial data for regularities, patterns, and general topics. Second, we recorded words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. Third, we recorded these phrases or codes as they emerged during data collection. Finally, we created indicators to match related data in our field notes. Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality of respondents, and pseudonyms replaced the names of institutions.

## Findings and Themes

Our analysis suggests that a public engagement agenda is differentially adopted and reflected in institutional practice at research universities. The greatest differentiation is the manner and extent of institutional boundary reshaping to accommodate this agenda. The particular findings related to the ways in which institutional boundaries expanded or reshaped. We also found that conflicting forces, real or perceived, such as institutional rankings, funding, disciplinary pressures, and promotion and tenure expectations can limit progress of an engagement agenda toward institutionalization.



Boundary Expansion and Compatibility

Mission compatibility with a public engagement agenda was confirmed at both land-grant and urban research institutions. However, the expression of engagement differed systematically by institution type, as shown in Table III.

Three of the cases share similar histories as major research universities defined by their land-grant traditions. This theme was heavily referenced throughout campus interviews as respondents alluded to their institutions’ historic missions as “universities of the people.” The mission statements at the three land-grant institutions point to a commitment to public service and outreach, chiefly through an extension-type model. One provost summarized a general conception of a land-grant institution’s role in connecting to societal needs: “The original articulation of the land-grant mission is to bring the knowledge of the university to the state. Now we extend this idea nationally and internationally, literally reaching out to anyone with our products of scholarly and creative work.” Review of campus documents suggests that the concept of engagement on these campuses is still emerging and that the rhetoric and practice leading the institution toward a two-way relationship with states and communities is largely dependent on the philosophy of campus leaders overseeing outreach activities. For example, engagement language might be used in press releases or executive addresses, but not in promotion and tenure discussions or documents.

In comparison with the land-grant universities, the urban research universities are relatively young. Mission and place have shaped their histories. As later comers to the field of higher education, they have had to differentiate themselves from the older flagship universities in the state. Showing sensitivity to the language of “urban,” all three institutions studied have become intentionally fixed or embedded within their city. Current leadership has capitalized on the metropolitan location as a learning laboratory and has positioned each university as the intellectual resource for its city. Engagement is not seen as a distinct function, but as an expression and expectation of research, teaching, and

**Table III** Model of Boundary Expansion Accommodating University–Community Engagement at Urban and Land-Grant Institutions

	Urban research institutions	Land-grant institutions
Compatibility	Younger “place-sensitive” institutions: engagement is explicitly expressed in mission and “brand” of the institution.	Mission still largely embedded in historical extension model— one-way transfer of knowledge.
Profitability— Self-interest	Diverse participants engaged in teaching, learning, and discovery. Researchers explicitly describe their work as directed toward social change—work is referred to as public scholarship.	Traditional research culture dominates and thus inhibits faculty interests in public scholarship. As a result, diffusion is not likely to occur.
Profitability—General	Engagement provides value to institution as a whole in that the work of individuals supports its “brand.” Since profitability is evident among faculty members, engagement is more likely to be diffused with enclaves of activity.	Specialized units (e.g., cooperative extension) developed to serve land-grant function. Separate staff hired to undertake public-oriented work.

service. Two institutions have created (branded) distinctive names for their institutional engagement, thus effecting a shortcut to communicating a set of values and expectations internally and externally.

This compatibility of mission with engagement as expressed through the definition of institutional boundaries is captured in the case of Southern Urban University. The goal of this institution is to be a premiere research university located in an urban setting. Again, the language used in its formal statements and documents as well as by its leadership is very particular. Its mission is, and always has been, to serve the urban community, to be a place for the nontraditional student, and to address urban problems. It strives to provide “lessons in the real world” through its real-world education, problem-solving research, and strong community service. Because of its location it has invested in local partnerships, and the city and state government and foundations have invested in it. Curricula are highly community focused, as is its research. Its policy center is the policy research arm for the state legislature. This university is very clear about its comparative advantage, and that is its location in the epicenter of the region.

Official documents and leadership’s language indicated mission compatibility with engagement for all six cases. However, the underlying institutional norms and values often were not fully compatible with a public engagement agenda. Specifically, traditional research norms or the “academic arms race” for prestige factors served as a countervailing factor. Traditional research relies on disciplinary, homogeneous, expert-led, supply-driven, hierarchical, peer-reviewed, and almost exclusively university-based knowledge generation. In contrast, engagement generates knowledge through approaches that are more applied, problem-centered, transdisciplinary, demand-driven, and network-embedded with external learning partners (Gibbons et al. 1994). Although research methodologies now reflect some blurring of the distinction between traditional research and engaged scholarship, traditional research approaches are still often perceived as more congruent with the values of a research institution than are methodologies grounded in engagement. While permeable boundaries exist between the universities and their communities and between units of a university, boundary expansion itself was tempered in particular cases. Examining the cases in terms of profitability provides additional perspective.

### Boundary Expansion and Profitability

As noted previously, we used the Carnegie Foundation’s (2007a) definition of engagement in studying our case institutions’ major community–university partnerships as the primary evidence of innovation profitability. Our classification of such partnerships as enclaved or diffused was based on the expected and actual involvement by unit members and the number of functions (teaching, research, service) involved in the partnerships. These two characteristics were interpreted as indicators of “self-interest.” For example, a new graduate degree at one institution’s social work department involved all faculty members and many community partners and agencies in the curriculum’s development and execution. The community-based and community-involved orientation of the curriculum permeated other departmental and then college-wide functions, resulting in such changes as more inclusive hiring criteria and broader, more representative advisory structures. This was classified as an example of diffusion.

*General profitability—establishment of enclaves* Partnerships as enclaves were fairly typical in the land-grant universities. Over time, these institutions have established specialized units (e.g., cooperative extension) to meet public engagement mission

obligations. An example is a national program that has long been a part of Great Lakes State University (GLSU). As a Sea Grant recipient, GLSU oversees large-scale freshwater programs in Lake Superior and Lake Michigan that serve commercial, sporting, and ecological interests. The program has a relatively stable federal and state funding stream and has a clear and detailed strategic plan derived from input from hundreds of national, regional, and local stakeholders. Sea Grant leaders are not tenure-track faculty members but rather GLSU outreach staff who regularly spend time in the coastal areas working with community members and agencies. One outreach staff member joked about the importance of getting out on the docks to “find out what the commercial guys and charter guys are grumpy about today.” Agents build a relationship with community members, aided by and building on the reputation which Sea Grant has gained by positioning itself as a neutral, nonadvocacy group whose goal is to provide scientific information to help state officials and the community make informed decisions. “The more we can make the science work for them, the more trust we can build,” said one Sea Grant agent.

This is not a “pure” enclave example, as there is boundary expansion into the “traditional” faculty when individuals have a particular self-interest. Underpinning all the GLSU outreach efforts is the research that guides water policy. Interviewees explained that most of the research ideas originate with Sea Grant agents and coastal partners. In turn, traditional faculty members are hired to complete the research; and outreach faculty translate the findings to the community. “Sea Grant has helped some of our young faculty members get on the road to tenure,” said one agent. “The program has provided funding for them, and they’ve gone on to be world experts.” Additionally, Sea Grant has supported over 300 doctoral or master’s level students’ research programs and provided them with national contacts and funding agencies that help their progress.

Even where diffusion is the goal, it can become enclaved in implementation. For instance, Southern State University (SSU) spearheaded a large-scale initiative to address poverty throughout the South. The initiative was launched with a federal grant and a matched local donation. Its purpose was to address health-related issues, low birth weights, adverse economic conditions, dropout rates, and other factors that contribute to persistent poverty in the rural south. Southern State University’s Vice President for Outreach has taken a lead in uniting partners across the south to participate in the study. Land-grant institutions are collaborating on the project in cooperation with state agencies, community partners, and the southern state governor’s office. However, despite campus-wide forums discussing poverty in the context of research and teaching as well as offers of small grants to entice traditional tenure-track faculty and their students to participate in this poverty initiative, most university participants are “enclaved”, outreach faculty members from the agricultural and rural development areas on campus.

Community partners reinforce the association with outreach faculty members who understand the need for their work to be practical and collaborative. Some acknowledged their perception that there were two cultures within the university—the outreach faculty and the traditional faculty. For instance, when asked about SSU’s approach to providing neutral policy alternatives, one leader of a nonprofit group said, “Neutrality depends on whether the information comes from the public service side or the academic side. The academic side doesn’t care about political sensitivity, but the service side has a keen awareness of the political environment and shapes the manner in which they present the material.”

Finally, in looking for indicators of long-term investment in the engagement initiative, one community partner summed up the importance of a financial commitment, saying, “SSU has an established history in outreach and structures built around this program. But

the money is always the issue. If the dollars are there, it will help.” While this initiative is perceived as important by the university (general profitability), the competing priorities of funded research and tuition-generating instruction take precedence in a period of budget cuts and political problems. Financial issues interfere with the profitability and thus the success of this initiative.

*Self-interest profitability—diffusion* As Levine (1980) noted, adoption by individuals throughout an organization reflects self-interest profitability of an innovation. A number of our cases, primarily urban universities, provided examples of major community–campus partnerships as innovations involving many diverse faculty, staff, and students to address a compelling need. In these instances, self-interest profitability has led to diffused boundary expansion.

Lake City University (LCU) provides such an example. Its Institute for Urban Health Partnerships has become nationally recognized for combining the knowledge of university faculty and staff with the know-how of public and private organizations and residents to develop more effective solutions to current health care issues. The initiative promotes its work through programs such as community nursing centers, clinical experiences for university students, practice-based research projects, and faculty practice contracts (clinical contracts for faculty to deliver nursing services through the roles of clinician, educator, researcher, and administrator). It builds on years of community engagement by LCU’s College of Nursing, which uses a health promotion and wellness model. Over the past 10 years its model has evolved to include faculty members, students, and support from three schools and colleges within the university, resulting in academic community nursing centers housed in social service agencies serving low-income populations. Each of these centers is a site for participatory research that seeks to develop new strategies and methods in response to community needs, as well as translational research, in which teams of nurse clinicians research and care for people in environments with few resources as a methodology for translating basic research to practical or clinical-level applications.

Public engagement expressed through research was identified as the self-interest attractor for many faculty members. At institutions with diffused engagement, researchers explicitly describe their work as directed toward social change, and such work is referred to as community-based research or public scholarship. At Midwest Metro University (MMU), leaders see their partnerships as examples of demand-driven “engaged research.” It has a particular orientation—the intersection of social justice and urban community planning—and, further, a particular methodology: academic and applied research and participatory action research. Researchers very explicitly describe their work as seeking “to impact social change” and to do so by creating “new knowledge with the intention that it is used to inform policy makers to improve housing advocacy and planning.” Engagement holds high self-interest profitability for faculty members who perceive an engagement agenda as a means to meet both their organizational research obligations and their personal need for their work to “make a difference.”

*More about boundaries* There are two other sets of findings of note. Data also indicated that boundaries of the enclaves and diffused models differed distinctly in nature. Enclaved innovations or partnerships reified boundaries and did not or could not expand even after attempts to achieve a more diffused approach (e.g., SSU’s poverty program). Diffused innovations and partnerships had more porous boundaries; in some cases participants moved in and out of the partnerships according to their self-interest. Although these boundaries could easily expand, they were also more vulnerable to contraction.

Another key finding was the importance of boundary spanners, those members who link their organization with the external environment, in both the enclaved and diffused examples. These important but difficult roles may be filled by a variety of personnel, including faculty leaders and former community organizers. In a partnership at MMU, a faculty member serving as program manager also plays a high-profile role as gatekeeper to the community—that is, a person who filters or regulates the flow of information. She coaches faculty and students as they participate in the partnership and demystifies research for the community partner.

## Conclusions and Interpretations

So how is the engagement agenda adopted and reflected in institutional practice at public research universities, and in what ways have institutional boundaries expanded or been reshaped to accommodate this agenda? Engagement, as an innovative concept in higher education, has variable levels of compatibility and profitability even within relatively similar institutional types. Although the institutions studied have missions compatible with engagement, not all have values and norms compatible with institutionalization of engagement. This is particularly true for land-grant institutions. Various factors, notably the pressure for “research extensive” national rankings largely based on federally funded grants, take precedence over external environmental factors promoting engagement. Limited resources are devoted to well-defined endeavors in contrast with the often touted yet amorphous goal of “advancing the public good.” In general, land-grant universities express engagement primarily through outreach and the outreach expert model performed in specialized, strong, traditional, enclaved units. Urban research universities more often express engagement through diffused curricula and research partnerships, particularly where public engagement is interpreted not as “service” but as an explicit venue for broader conceptions of teaching and research.

Innovation as significant change does not occur in any institution until the combined forces for change are greater than the forces preserving the *status quo*. The large, complex land-grant research elites have been successful with their historic versions of engagement; consequently they are less motivated to change, and their boundaries are relatively reified. In contrast, in the younger urban research universities fewer forces act to preserve the *status quo*; and engagement can be a distinct element of the institutional identity that they are in the process of creating. The flexibility of institutional behaviors and boundaries that results from viewing engagement as a manifestation of teaching, research, and service makes institutional transformation possible.

These findings may be especially timely for institutional leaders since organizations such as the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching now include engagement in measures of quality and classification. Each institution must define engagement for itself and explore ways to reshape its boundaries accordingly. Because of differences in underlying norms and values, institutions define success of public engagement efforts in different ways. At some institutions, creation of enclaves may satisfy faculty, administration, and community definitions of success; at others, only diffusion is considered successful engagement. Our cases suggest that both enclaving and diffusion can yield institutional engagement. Each form of engagement has its own threats and opportunities. Typically enclaves are easier to establish within the norms of campus;

but such units can become marginalized, isolated, and vulnerable. Diffusion requires widespread change in institutional culture.

Consistent with Eckel and Kezar's (2003) work on institutional transformation, our findings suggest the importance of culture and how members of the organization make sense of their work within the norms, values, and practices of their organization. Following Eckel and Kezar, we suggest that, even with mission compatibility and strong leadership, institutionalizing a public engagement agenda is interpreted within faculty members' definitions of self-interest. The 25 faculty members interviewed in this study were selected because of their involvement in a major partnership, so it is not surprising that the vast majority were passionate and committed to their work. They expressed a keen interest in doing useful, relevant, "community engaged" work, but even most members of this group do not know how to integrate this intention with their research roles. This was particularly the case in land-grant institutions. Land-grant faculty members saw documenting and being rewarded for engagement efforts as in their self-interest only if the work could be framed within the traditional categories of teaching or research. Engaged scholarship can grow only if academic review, promotion, and tenure systems are examined and retooled to value and reward quality and rigor in such endeavors. The emerging work on faculty members who integrate their teaching, research, and service roles would be helpful here, as would the adoption of a more integrated view of scholarship across a critical mass of faculty that compels the reformation of culture and policies (Braxton et al. 2002; Bringle and Hatcher 2000, Colbeck 1998; O'Meara and Rice 2005; Peters et al. 2005).

Finally, our research suggests a refinement to Levine's model. Our data indicate that, rather than diffusion, *infusion* more aptly describes organization-wide boundary expansion. "Diffusion" carries a connotation of dilution and dispersion. In organizations with diffused rather than enclaved engagement, the innovation was dispersed but not diluted. In fact, a sense of mission enactment was more strongly infused throughout the organization.

Holland (2005) wrote that research universities as flagship institutions can have a "critical dampening effect on wider institutionalization of engagement" (p. 254). Our cases indicate that such research universities are taking differing pathways in their quest to serve the public good. Rather than dampening institutionalization of engagement, they are realizing it in forms that reflect their institutional norms and values. The engagement agenda is most fully realized in urban research universities, whose lack of attachment to traditional research models and emphasis on community embedment lend themselves to true collaboration with community partners. However, land-grant universities, using a tradition of outreach as a starting point, are also consciously moving toward greater awareness of community needs and broader acknowledgment of community input.

## Further Work

Since this study revealed that faculty perception of self-interest profitability is key to the adoption of engagement as an innovation, faculty members' engaged practice warrants more specific investigation. Rogers's (2003) theory of perceived attribution—that is, the "characteristics of an innovation, as perceived by individuals, that help explain their different rates of adoption" (p. 15)—is a possible lens for studying how individual faculty view a practice or innovation that is a form or aspect of engagement in terms of its complexity, compatibility, as well as its trialability—the degree to which it can be experimented with on a limited basis.

This study showed that institutional history and setting help explain the institutionalization (or noninstitutionalization) of engagement as an innovation. Other dimensions to be considered are the ability of these institutions to change over time and the conditions under which such change can occur. The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (1999) challenged higher education to reframe its institutions. With time, can these large, complex organizations move from engagement in enclaves to engagement as a cultural habit? This analysis focused on organizational boundaries relative to the innovation of engagement. Another area of analysis is the degree to which these organizations practice engagement as two-way, collaborative partnerships that result in mutually beneficial learning.

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