

**(Re)Defining the University as an Anchor Institution**

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## **Abstract**

Town-gown engagement has evolved over several eras, most recently embodying the anchor institution model. The post-1990 scholarship suggests a distinct shift, describing a new framework for the ways universities engage with neighborhood space. This paper tests this approach, using a survey of universities to question several assumptions about town-gown engagement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the conceptual definition and stylistic approach to engagement has changed, there appears to be less differentiation from earlier models than one might expect. The study offers a typology of university revitalization strategies and contributes a new perspective to the anchor institution discourse.

## **Introduction**

For more than a decade, scholars have contributed to a body of literature that documents the character and scope of university investments in neighborhood revitalization. Broadly speaking, the conversations fall into three categories. The largest category includes articles, books, and reports dedicated to defining the anchor institution model, as well as identifying core strategies and best practices. This discourse often originates from think tanks and scholars, as well as reflective pieces from higher education leaders and administrators (e.g., Dubb, McKinley, & Howard, 2013; Friedman, Perry, & Menendez, 2014; Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Initiative for a Competitive Inner City & CEOs for Cities, 2002; Rodin, 2007). The second category engages with single or comparative cases to explore the scope and experience of anchor institutions in a community; these conversations are frequently positive, but can also include critiques of the institution and their efforts (e.g., Bose, 2015; Bromley & Kent, 2006; Perry & Wiewel, 2005; Silverman, Lewis, & Patterson, 2014; Webber, 2005). The third category is more nascent, examining not just the composition of anchor strategies, but also evidence-based outcomes, opportunities, and potential consequences for neighborhoods with anchor institution investment (e.g., Ehlenz, 2015, 2016; Silverman, Patterson, Yin, & Wu, 2015).

This study seeks to blur the lines between these perspectives. Relying on university-reported survey data, the research engages with scholarly discourse, assessing the generalizability

of anchor institution approaches and challenging some of the inherent assumptions. The research begins with a review of precedents for town-gown engagement and a summary of key features of the present-day anchor institution model and its best practices. Subsequently, it presents findings from a survey of twenty-two U.S. universities pursuing neighborhood revitalization, challenging some of the assumptions that are often made in articles, reports, and the media.

The survey offers insights into the types of institutions choosing to invest in neighborhood revitalization initiatives, the specific strategies administrators choose to employ, and the prevalence (or absence) of some of the anchor institution best practices. The observations complicate the notion of an anchor institution model and lend themselves to a typology of university revitalization approaches, accounting for variation in the depth of revitalization strategies and the emphasis on place-based investments. The results suggest that, although gown's approach to town is surely different than it was in previous decades, the university appears to rely on a similar set of tools. Despite the opportunities for wealth-building identified in the literature, universities appear to dedicate less attention to neighborhood revitalization strategies that emphasize people-focused "soft" investments, including targeted programs, incentives, or local hiring and procurement. Instead, a greater proportion of their efforts trend towards "hard" investments in development and/or infrastructure, emphasizing physical upgrading and market-based outcomes. These findings contribute new insights to the anchor institution literature, highlighting some of the misalignments between what "is" (i.e., what universities are investing in) and what "could be" (i.e., models and best practices in the anchor institution literature).

## **Methodology**

This study uses a landscape survey to understand the scale and scope of university investments in neighborhood revitalization. The survey targeted university administrators and collected information about neighborhood revitalization efforts.

### ***Defining university investment in neighborhood revitalization***

The survey offered a definition of neighborhood revitalization that included institutional initiatives targeting off-campus quality of life issues, including physical conditions (e.g., property conditions, public infrastructure, and amenities), socio-economic conditions (e.g., poverty and unemployment), services (e.g., commercial and retail, neighborhood schools), and/or public safety conditions. Collectively, these efforts represent a special form of university engagement, aligned with the post-1990 anchor institution era, that simultaneously addresses neighborhood conditions (a “public” interest) and institutional needs (a “private” interest).

University efforts in neighborhood revitalization can be contrasted with university investments in campus expansion. University campus expansion includes: physical development activities that extend the existing campus boundary and primarily address institutional needs, such as university dorms, academic facilities, research buildings, or support services (e.g., hotel or conference center). Additional criteria distinguish university investments neighborhood revitalization, including: (1) investments that extend beyond the existing campus boundary and encompass *more than* university-specific needs or facilities; (2) investments in physical improvement that target both university- and privately-owned properties; and/or (3) university investments in neighborhoods that address non-physical dimensions, such as (but not limited to) community capacity building, service learning, or technical expertise (e.g., expertise to support primary or secondary education, workforce development, homeownership counseling).

### ***University selection criteria***

To qualify for the survey, universities had to satisfy three criteria. The first criterion used a compound definition to isolate a particular subset of higher education institutions, categorized as (1) accredited, (2) four-year, (3) degree-granting (4) urban universities in the Institutional Post-Secondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) in the 2012-2013 reporting year. “Urban” is defined as an urbanized city or suburb with a population greater than 100,000 in the IPEDS database, including large and mid-sized cities and large suburbs. The purpose of this criterion was to narrow the field to those institutions that are predisposed to engage in revitalization activities, due their neighborhood context (e.g. density, socio-economic conditions, town-gown proximities) and institutional capacity. This requirement narrowed the population from 7,735 possible institutions to 1,030 urban universities.

Second, the anchor institution literature had to identify a university as participating, in some capacity, in neighborhood engagement and revitalization. Given the nascent state of the field, this criterion aimed to constrict the sample to those institutions that were already familiar with the anchor institution conversation. An institution may not be engaged in an active discourse about revitalization interventions with its peer institutions, but its presence in the literature ensured the institution was, at a minimum, aware of the trends. The literature review included articles, books, reports, and conference presentations or proceedings. It identified sixty-five qualified universities who were investing in some form of town-gown engagement or revitalization effort. Subsequently, experts in the field validated the list.

Third, selected universities had to self-identify, in the survey, as investing in neighborhood revitalization activities between 1990 and the present. This builds on the rationale for the second criteria. In order to provide an accurate account of their activities, survey respondents had to possess an understanding of the trends in university revitalization, including the types of activities

described in the survey. In addition, the participant needed to have an awareness of their institution's investments (ongoing and in the recent past), as they pertained to town-gown engagement. An initial email, as well as the first section of the survey, offered revitalization and expansion activity definitions to participating universities; participants were asked to verify their involvement in one or both of these efforts before proceeding with the study.

### ***Survey instrument***

Following the identification of a valid population, an online survey tool (1) determined if an institution satisfied the third and fourth criteria, and (2) collected information about the motivations, scale, and scope of university interventions. The initial contacts for the survey were university administrators. University leaders were more likely to have a comprehensive view of their institution's investments as compared to a program administrator who may know a lot about one strategy, but not necessarily all strategies. The initial point of contact included Presidents, Executive Vice Presidents, and/or Vice Presidents of finance, administration and/or operations; subsequently, these leaders referred the author to other university representatives for the survey, as appropriate.

The survey asked participating institutions to focus on revitalization activities since 1990, which corresponds with the earliest discussions of university revitalization efforts in the anchor institution literature. It collected information about three major aspects of a university's investment in revitalization. Each section of the survey attempted to gather information about the scope of the investment and the status of the project. The three major survey components included: (1) the geographic boundaries for the university's neighborhood revitalization activities since 1990; (2) specific details about these activities, including broad categories of investment and project-specific details for housing, commercial, and economic development efforts; and (3) a summary of the

motivating factors for the university to invest in neighborhood revitalization efforts, as well as any efforts to evaluate their strategies and neighborhood outcomes.

The survey asked respondents to report their revitalization activities using seven pre-determined categories of investment, in addition to soliciting supporting details. The researcher established the categories based on a review of the anchor institution literature. The categories ranged from traditional engagement efforts, including (1) public safety initiatives, (2) public amenity investments, (3) student volunteerism and community service, and (4) support initiatives for K-12 education, to more recent anchor strategies, including (5) housing, (6) commercial, and (7) economic development initiatives. For institutions investing in housing, commercial, or economic development, the survey asked for additional information about specific subsets of activities, including “hard” investments in buildings or infrastructure versus “soft” investments in programs or incentives. Together, these categories enabled the researcher to consider not just individual approaches, but also establish trends across institutions.

### ***Survey respondents***

Between August and October 2014, twenty-two universities responded to the survey (34% response rate), including twelve public and ten private institutions in nineteen cities and fifteen states (Table 1). On most counts, the respondents were typical of the sixty-five universities invited to participate in the survey. Geographically, engaged universities existed in every region of the country, though survey respondents were modestly over-represented in the Midwest and under-represented in the South and West relative to the sample. They were also comparably dispersed among large cities (more than 250,000 people), mid-sized cities (100,000 to 250,000 people), and large suburbs (more than 250,000 people). From an institutional perspective, public and private universities participated in revitalization activities in nearly uniform numbers with a roughly equal

distribution among both the survey respondents and the sample. In addition, the distributions of Carnegie classifications for university types and enrollment profiles were similar, though they skew slightly towards research universities with large enrollments.

[Table 1 near here]

## **Universities in Place: Characteristics, Conflicts, and Solutions**

### ***Defining the Anchor Institution***

The Aspen Institute first coined term "anchor institution" in a 2001 study, defining anchors as urban institutions "that have a significant infrastructure in a specific community and are therefore unlikely to move" (Fulbright-Anderson, Auspos, & Anderson, 2001). In other words, the salient characteristic of an anchor is its large investments in place via real estate, facilities, and/or other fixed assets, which distinguishes them from other types of corporate entities. Higher educational facilities and hospitals, "eds and meds," are the foremost examples of anchors in urban neighborhoods. Yet, the connection between an anchor institution and place goes beyond its bricks-and-mortar presence; these anchors also attract people and resources to their communities.

In the U.S., more than half of all universities are located in urban centers (Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, 2010). They serve as massive generators of economic development through traditional academic research and service provision, as well as consumption through the attraction of a large student body (Goddard & Vallance, 2013; Perry & Wiewel, 2005). In a 2002 report, the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City and CEOs for Cities noted urban universities spent \$136 billion on salaries, goods, and services (in 1996). They also employed two million workers, two-thirds of whom were in non-faculty administrative and support positions, and owned more than \$100 billion in fixed assets in cities (2002). Similarly, in 2010, eds and meds in the five major cities of the Northeast Corridor collectively employed nearly a million people,



claimed nearly \$100 billion in aggregated operating budgets, and attracted \$28 billion in sponsored programs, gifts, and contracts (Birch, 2013).

Although institutional immobility and intimate ties to a regional economy characterize anchor institutions, they do not account for the motivations driving universities to invest in their neighborhoods. Scholars do not make the argument that universities should invest in neighborhood revitalization efforts in pursuit of economic gain—likely because it recalls urban renewal justifications. Instead, some scholars argue there are historic precedents for active university involvement in matters of community, such as the role of universities in public health and settlement houses of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Taylor & Luter, 2013). Others posit “enlightened self-interest” is a primary motivator for urban institutions to engage in place-based interventions (Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Sungu-Eryilmaz, 2009; Webber & Karlstrom, 2009). Dependent upon their ability to attract faculty, staff, and students, as well as maintain the value of their fixed assets, universities possess a natural stake in the quality and stability of their neighborhood. Thus, from the enlightened self-interest perspective, university investments in neighborhood improvement are thought to be as beneficial to the institution as they are to the community.

### ***Tracing Five Eras of Town-Gown Engagement***

University-community engagement models have evolved across five eras, each a product of the socio-political relations and resources at the time. The first era is rooted in the designation of land grant institutions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Morrill Act, passed in 1862, represents the first federal intervention in the U.S. higher educational system (Mumper, Gladieux, King, & Corrigan, 2011). The legislation allocated land to states for the creation of land-grant colleges as part of westward expansion efforts; states either used the land directly for the institution or sold the land

and established an endowment with the proceeds (Bromley, 2006; Mumper et al., 2011). The Morrill Act facilitated curriculum changes that expanded the reach of higher education beyond traditional liberal arts and theology and provided practical education in industry and agriculture. While it did not necessarily achieve its initial purpose of bolstering local industry, the Act did foster an enduring connection between a university and its regional economy.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced a second era of university engagement. As cities experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization, an influx of immigrants and working poor initiated a different model of university-community engagement. Some universities embraced the “urban laboratory,” engaging with the surrounding neighborhoods to address physical and social ills. The settlement house movement offers a prime example (Bromley, 2006; O’Mara, 2012). Originating in London, the settlement house movement brought university faculty and students out of their ivory towers and into urban settlements, where they could experience slum living, conduct participatory action research, and provide basic education, public health, and other social services. An exemplar in the US was Jane Addams’ Hull House, a partnership forged with the University of Chicago. However, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century marched forward, the priorities of urban anchors shifted and community partnerships around social issues declined.

The third period emerged in the wake of World War II, as university engagement shifted towards direct intervention in neighborhoods to eliminate blight and expand the campus footprint. These activities were a response to federally-funded demands for research and growing enrollments via the GI Bill (O’Mara, 2005); a large body of literature documents the design, implementation, and outcomes of these interventions (Birch & Silver, 2009; Carriere, 2011; Teaford, 2000; Winling, 2011). Procedurally, universities and cities alike viewed Urban Renewal as an opportunity to “clean house,” clearing away physical, social, and economic blight from the

neighborhoods. Broad demolition and population displacement preceded the development of new university-affiliated facilities; other times, universities failed to realize their ambitious development plans, leaving cleared, vacant land in their portfolios. The aesthetics of Urban Renewal also shaped town-gown engagement, as Modernist leanings created campuses that were inward-looking, reinforcing the vision of the university as an isolated academic enclave. Predictably, contention and mistrust characterized town-gown relationships during this period as clear schisms emerged between the interests of the university and the surrounding neighborhood.

Following the top-down engagement of the 1950s and 1960s, urban institutions largely disengaged from physical planning within their neighborhoods, returning to their “scholarly enclave” roots (Perry, Wiewel, & Menendez, 2009). Many universities were dealing with constricted budgets and the energy crisis of the 1970s, while also retreating from the acrimonious effects of Urban Renewal. As a result, the fourth period of engagement was largely place-neutral, instead emphasizing academic-based community service and student learning as a way to engage “intellectually” with neighborhoods and bring them into the classroom (Hodges & Dubb, 2012). This model persisted as the predominant form of town-gown engagement until the late 1990s and early 2000s, when academic interest was, once again, joined by the university’s vested interest in place.

After a downturn in the economy, accompanied by rising crime and disinvestment rates, several urban universities faced place-based challenges once again in the 1980s and 1990s (Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Perry et al., 2009; Rodin, 2007). A decrease in federal research funding shifted the focus of many institutions from national to local, as physical deterioration loomed at urban campus doorsteps. Given the lingering consequences of the Urban Renewal era, several universities recognized an opportunity (and necessity) to reshape the town-gown relationship. The current

anchor institution model, including investments in neighborhood revitalization, emerged out of this paradigm shift.

Anchor institution scholarship is primarily grounded in the post-1990 discourse, rarely making connections across the five eras of town-gown engagement. Further, outside of the post-WWII era, there is little discussion about how university interactions with and interventions in neighborhoods changed over time or influenced subsequent attitudes. And, yet, the longer view is important for understanding the scope and implications of the current anchor institution model. Although universities have engaged in a conceptually different conversation about place over the last twenty years, the strategies they choose to pursue as an anchor institution may be more similar to earlier engagement models than previously thought. If that is case, what does that imply for the outcomes of university engagement in the realm of place? And how might universities and anchor institution scholars adapt the model to foster greater alignment between the best practices identified in the literature and the outcomes reflected in place?

## **Findings**

The findings begin with a brief review of the core tenets of the post-1990 anchor institution model, as summarized by two key frameworks in the literature. This serves as the normative position for the field: what are and/or should anchor institutions be pursuing according to the literature? Subsequently, this normative position is compared to survey responses from universities engaged in this work, testing the validity of the assumptions and considering the relationship across five eras of town-gown engagement.

## ***Roles and Assumptions for Anchor Institutions in the Post-1990 Era***

In the current era, scholars, think tanks, and philanthropic organizations often emphasize the anchor institution as an accumulation of wealth, skills, and opportunities in the neighborhood, contextualizing it against the university's role as a social institution. They speak to the immense opportunity of harnessing these assets and redistributing them, at least in part, into place (Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, 2010; Dubb & Howard, 2012; Dubb, McKinley, & Howard, 2013; Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Initiative for a Competitive Inner City & CEOs for Cities, 2002). Embedded in their arguments is an implicit expectation that the university and its neighbors share a common definition of "quality of life" and the institution's relative strength can be leveraged to lift all (or most) of the neighborhood's proverbial boats.

In the last decade, two primary models of anchor institution engagement have emerged in the field. Both originate from research institutes with an emphasis on cities and anchors; and they share similar attributes, highlighting the breadth of skills, assets and opportunities a university—or other anchor institutions, such as a hospital—possesses and identifying ways to leverage those opportunities for neighborhood improvement.

Initiative for a Competitive Inner City offered one of the earlier "action agendas" for anchor institutions, with an initial framework presented in 2002 and a refined version offered in 2010 (Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, 2010; Initiative for a Competitive Inner City & CEOs for Cities, 2002; Porter, 2010). In keeping with ICIC's mission to "drive economic prosperity in America's inner cities through private sector investment to create jobs, income, and wealth for local residents" (Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, 2016), the framework identifies seven key roles that anchor institutions play in urban communities and, subsequently, offers strategies for adapting those roles to stimulate local improvement.

ICIC's proposed roles can be classified into four groups: core institutional roles; economic roles; physical roles; and public purpose roles. Within its core interests as an institution, the university (1) provides education and services (core institutional role); and (2) serves as an innovation hub (cluster anchor), facilitating and leveraging talent, capital, and business development and growth. As an economic engine, the anchor can tap into its role as a (3) employer, (4) purchaser of goods and services, and/or (5) resource for workforce development. Given its status as a major landholder with substantial physical assets, the university also functions as a (6) real estate developer within its community. And, from a public purpose perspective, the university possesses the talent and expertise to (7) build community capacity and infrastructure (community infrastructure builder).

The Democracy Collaborative, a progressive research institute at the University of Maryland, contributes another framework for understanding and, ultimately, evaluating the roles of anchor institutions in place. *The Anchor Dashboard* encompasses an "anchor mission" approach to town-gown engagement (Dubb, McKinley, Howard, & Collaborative, 2013). This mission approach distinguishes various community engagement programs from an institutional commitment to permanently engage with community challenges as part of the day-to-day business and culture of the organization. The framework aims to provide anchors a means of measuring and interpreting their impact on the community, with a focus on low-income households.

The report compiles interviews and readily available data resources to propose a "dashboard" with four indicators; each indicator is augmented by a series of specific metrics that offer a more precise definition and begin to quantify the anchor's place-based impact. The indicators include: economic development, spanning equitable local and minority hiring and procurement, business incubation, affordable housing, and arts and cultural development;

community building, including building community capacity and contributing to financially secure households; education of youth (K-12); and health, safety and environment, addressing public safety, healthy neighborhoods, and environmental stewardship.

As a practitioner resource, the framework offers a broader perspective of community impact than the ICIC approach, demonstrated by its focus on public health, environmental, and K-12 education metrics in addition to economic development. At the same time, it too remains largely focused on the institutional perspective with respect to available data and scope of impacts. Arguably, this approach ensures that the framework can be more readily utilized by anchors; and, certainly, its emphasis on defining an anchor mission as an institutional “state of mind” that guides choices across a broad spectrum, rather than disparate programs or investments, represents progress in the anchor institution discourse. Yet, these models also remain conceptual, offering a framework for the integrated strategies an anchor institution could pursue in a generalized way. Survey responses suggest that universities are not yet embracing the full spectrum of anchor strategies, but more narrowly emphasizing a few pathways. In addition, existing frameworks do not adequately account for the prevalence of real estate-driven strategies and, as a result, are not capturing the full extent of an institution’s direct and indirect impact on place.

***Challenging the discourse and (re)defining the engaged university: A new typology of engagement strategies***

University survey responses point to a two-tiered typology for university anchor strategies (Table 2), which responds to the diversity in anchor institution approaches and calibrates for the place-based nature of many efforts. First, the typology addresses the scope of initiatives with an intensity indicator, signaling how many of the seven key activities the university pursued. Low intensity approaches consist of fewer than four key strategies, medium intensity efforts include four or five

key strategies, and high intensity initiatives are comprised of at least six of the seven key strategies. Subsequently, the typology considers the place-based investments in housing and commercial strategies. Here, the focus is on bricks-and-mortar projects, reflecting the prevalence of physical development tools relative to soft-side revitalization strategies in the survey results. The place-based category identifies real estate-based investments, specifying if strategies were: mixed (incorporating investments in both housing and commercial), housing focused (alone), commercial focused (alone), or if there was no hard place-based investment. Supplementary tables offer a more detailed accounting of university activities (see supplementary tables 1 and 2).

[Table 2 near here]

The typology reveals several insights with respect the diversity and breadth of university revitalization activities. First, it confirms that institutions continue to pursue conventional forms of town-gown engagement by applying their knowledge and student assets in the community. More than three-quarters of surveyed universities indicated that student-centric activities are part of their neighborhood engagement strategy, including community service (86%) and public safety (77%) initiatives (on- and off-campus). A slightly lesser proportion (68%) engaged with K-12 education in some capacity. Based on the historic precedent for these activities, as well as the style and depth of engagement they require, these activities can be classified as the “traditional” approach to town-gown engagement, echoing the core institutional roles in the ICIC and Democracy Collaborative frameworks, as well as earlier eras of town-gown engagement. These strategies fulfill the institution’s student-driven mission by creating opportunities for student volunteerism and applied learning, connecting the classroom and research to the local community. They also address the institution’s core concern for student wellbeing by extending campus safety measures into the adjacent neighborhoods. Safety initiatives can include neighborhood policing



that augments municipal policing in the target area, the placement of public safety officers along key routes, or university buses on fixed and/or flexible routes that connect the neighborhood to the campus.

The majority of universities surveyed also reported investments in economic that went beyond the conventional knowledge sharing and community service roles. This category of engagement corresponds with the general thrust of the ICIC and Democracy Collaborative frameworks, emphasizing connections between the institution's resource needs (e.g., consumer goods, employees) and the local economy. And, yet, the survey results imply there is a disconnect between best practice and in-practice strategies. While 59% of university respondents reported engagement with local economic development, their responses were the least consistent in terms of types of activities and definitions, as well as their relationship to the anchor institution literature. Approximately half of the universities participating in economic development efforts claimed comprehensive programs, meaning they were involved in at least three of the four sub-activities in the category. However, only two institutions—both private—described strategies that deliberately sought to concentrate institutional resources (e.g., procurement, hiring, contracting) in a specific neighborhood, which would reflect their other revitalization strategies.

Responses to economic revitalization questions suggest three things. First, though several universities report investments in economic development, the geographic focus was distinct from other physical revitalization interventions. While housing and commercial projects were typically neighborhood based, economic strategies often targeted the entire city or region. Second, many of the economic strategies were rooted in existing policies or protocols; they often were not part of a deliberate anchor institution strategy. For example, public universities were already participating in a version of local procurement and contracting as an extension of state mandates; some private

universities were required to comply with local hiring and/or procurement as a condition of their city-approved institutional master plans or community benefits agreements. Here, too, “local” was a relative term and often referred to much broader areas. Third, economic development activities often occurred at a high level, intersecting with citywide initiatives or community service activities. While some strategies represented direct investments in wealth generation, via job creation, skills training, procurement investments, or entrepreneurship, other programs sought to build awareness or opportunities more broadly. For instance, one institution described a neighborhood newsletter project, staffed by university students and designed to highlight residents and opportunities in a low-income community; another referenced a career development program intended to provide skills for regional business sectors. In principle, these strategies point towards efforts to link the town’s economic fortunes to the gown’s economic assets. However, the reported activities often diverge from the best practice strategies with respect to directed investment in local economies. This suggests that many anchor institutions have not realized the full potential of local economic development strategies as described in the literature.

Focusing on the post-1990 revitalization interventions in housing and commercial areas, market interventions and project-based developments dominated the landscape, as opposed to programs or policies targeted to specific populations or socioeconomic conditions. New construction projects, often comprised of private development on university-owned land, were at the center of most university revitalization strategies and were represented far more often than homeownership programs or targeted workforce development initiatives, for example.

More than half of the surveyed institutions pointed to investments in off-campus housing and commercial efforts. Half of universities were actively investing in commercial development as part of their revitalization strategies, though this is rarely identified in the anchor institution

discourse. Commercial strategies emphasized “hard” investments, including new construction, acquisition of commercial property, and/or active commercial property management. These efforts were either university-led (i.e. the university was the developer or property manager) or, more often, completed in partnership with a private developer who retained a long-term land lease for university-owned land and/or a university subsidiary. Alternately, commercial initiatives also included university tenancy, where the institution signed a lease for a portion of a new commercial project, lending its institutional reputation to augment the legitimacy and financial feasibility of the development.

More than two-thirds of respondents reported off-campus housing activities (68%), reflecting two trends. First, there was significant interest in housing development, including new construction, property acquisition for the purposes of upgrading existing rental stock and/or maintaining downward pressure on market rents, and/or property management. These strategies were implemented by the university, private partners (often via a long-term land lease), or university subsidiaries with targeted housing missions. The majority of place-based housing strategies reflected these hard investments (63%), either alone (36%) or in tandem with the second type of approach—soft strategies.

Soft housing initiatives consisted of targeted programs or incentives. Where present, these investments often included mortgage and/or rehabilitation incentives for university-affiliated households living in the target neighborhood or, in fewer instances, affordable housing initiatives that extended to the entire neighborhood. For example, one university directed its resources towards community development corporations, who were in a stronger position to invest in the creation and preservation of affordable housing. Nearly one-quarter of universities (27%) included

some type of soft housing strategy in their revitalization efforts; only one institution invested in soft side efforts alone.

Across the study, 41% of universities met the criteria for high intensity revitalization approaches. Within this group, each of the universities pursued at least one type of place-based strategy and the majority (six out of nine institutions) claimed hard investments in both housing and commercial projects. A slightly larger share of the respondents reported medium intensity approaches, with the majority of these institutions (60%) including at least one type of place-based initiative, while 40% invested in both housing and commercial projects. Lastly, three universities (14%) described low intensity initiatives, each investing in two of seven broad revitalization categories. Of this group, only one invested in hard housing projects, while the remainder emphasized the traditional community service and student-centric activities alone.

### **Implications**

The survey-based typology underscores the role of place-based investment in university revitalization strategies. In contrast to the best practice frameworks, many universities have not yet embraced the anchor institution ideology as part of their “business as usual” approach to town-gown engagement. More specifically, the potential for local economic development seems to be only partially realized, despite the discourse in the field; meanwhile, student- and research-centered community service and investments in “hard,” place-based strategies are central to many university strategies. What do these insights imply about the anchor institution model? And, more importantly, what significance do they hold for university and neighborhood outcomes alike?

The frequency of real estate investment offers the most significant revelation for the anchor institution model—an observation that is not adequately addressed in the existing literature, despite its substantial impact. In her article on university economic engagement, Margaret O’Mara takes

a long view of university-community interactions (1949 to 1980), arguing that the institution's physical needs and development prowess has historically shaped the town-gown relationship (2012). This author's research resonates with the arc of O'Mara's argument. There are substantial parallels between the Urban Renewal anchor and the "enlightened self-interest" anchor of today. Whereas today's university anchors take a much gentler approach to neighborhood revitalization, eschewing eminent domain and blunt slum clearance tactics of the past, the essential development tools (e.g., new construction and/or rehabilitation in the commercial and housing sectors) remain the same. Consequentially, the influx of new investment in the built environment can have significant effects for market trends. In this regard, the current anchor institution landscape is not as removed from Urban Renewal era tools as one might expect.

This point introduces a second implication of the survey findings. At present, the anchor institution models and best practices do not readily engage with the market impacts and demographic changes that follow from significant investments in the built environment. In other research, the author has demonstrated that university investments in neighborhood revitalization are associated with significant increases in median home values that exceed trends in neighborhoods without a university revitalization initiative (Ehlenz, 2016). Similarly, a detailed analysis of change in the University of Pennsylvania's West Philadelphia neighborhood illustrated the bifurcated nature of improvement; while market values increased significantly in the core investment area, there was also substantial turnover in demographic characteristics and little evidence of socioeconomic improvement in the target zone (Ehlenz, 2015).

At present, there is an imbalance in the anchor institution model. As illustrated, the current discourse and associated frameworks tend to under-represent the real estate contributions and expertise of the universities. They also do not consider the impact anchor institutions can have on

the private market when they signal an enduring commitment to neighborhood improvement through their initiatives. Together, these absences create an unevenness in the model. However, there is great potential to remedy this market-focused asymmetry through targeted place-based investments and renewed commitments to the local economic development practices highlighted in the literature. Anchor institutions, by virtue of their strong commitment to place, are in a unique position to consider future market-side challenges during the early stages of their engagement efforts. For instance, the institution could specifically direct resources towards preserving affordable housing or housing affordability programs that align with broader place-based improvements. Similarly, universities could modify their broader economic development practices in order to generate stronger local impact, which could correspond to subsequent increases in the cost of living. Through a more direct understanding of the primary tools and subsequent outcomes of neighborhood revitalization initiatives, the anchor institution model can be adapted to better generate, but also anticipate, change.

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