Vol. 5 No. 3

IU Community Engagement Conference Proceedings

ENGAGE!

Co-Created Knowledge Serving the Public Good

CONTENTS

05 **Guest Editor Todd Burkhardt**

08 **Table Talk: Insights from the Statewide Conference**

IU Unconference Reflections

11 **Rituals of an Unconference**
Bringing community engaged scholars together is always a worthwhile endeavor that allows them to share their experiences.
Jeremy Price

14 **Technical Assistance**
We reflect together on complex issues, from local politics and conflicts with partners to the community tragedies of natural disaster, youth overdose and suicide.
Rebecca Mueller

16 **A Menu-based Approach**
Developing this generation's civic skills is vital to maintaining and strengthening the foundation of democracy.
Elizabeth A. Bennion

19 **Helping All Hoosiers Win**
The Community Engagement Unconference was a validating and encouraging experience for me.
Jennifer Price Mahoney

21 **Importance of Institution and Network Building**
Network building, related to public health nursing, involves the process of bringing people with common interests together.
Kim A. Decker, Catherine M. Sherwood-Laughlin, & Suzanne R. Allen

CONTENTS

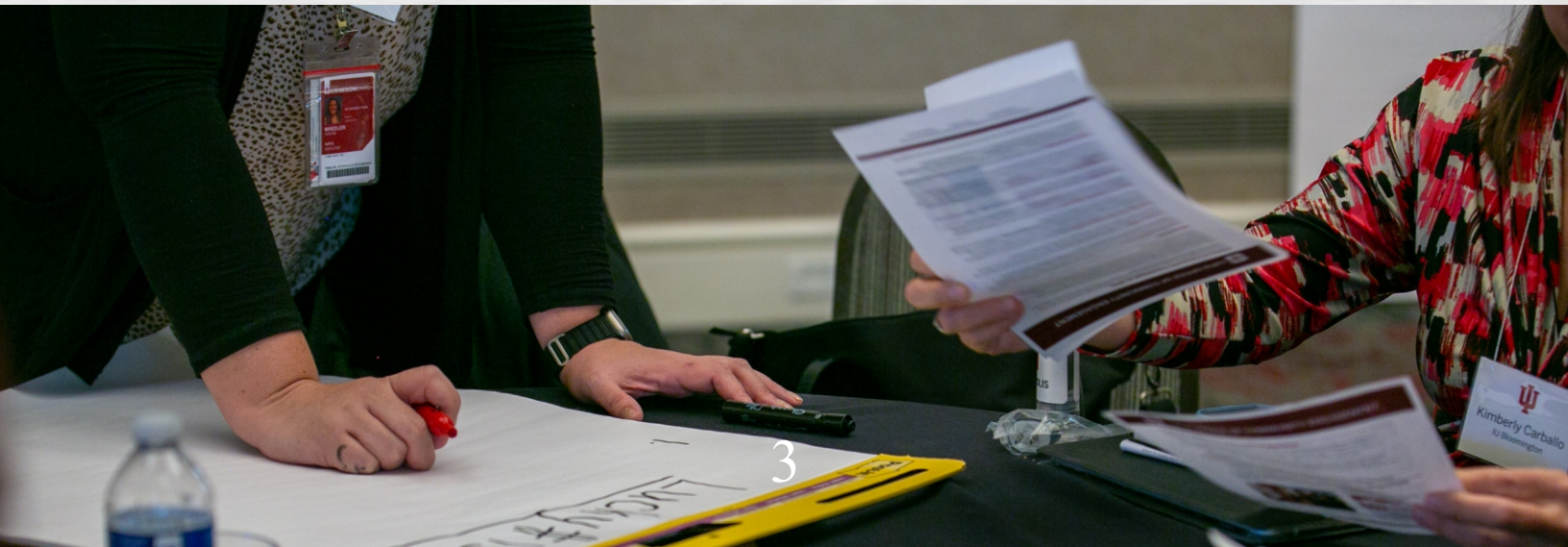
23 **Using First-Year Students to Harness Data**
Data is a crucial asset for every business or organization, but the ability to effectively manage it varies widely.
Karen Y. S. Banks

SPEAKING UP AND SPEAKING OUT STUDENT ARTICLES

26 **Community Engagement as a Civically-Engaged Professional**
One of the most influential statements I was ever told came from my former undergraduate research mentor Dr. Jason Ng, "People who work at universities are servants to their communities."
Rafael A. Alamilla

28 **Call for Future Conference**
Alexander Lipsey

30 **Unconference Planning**
Annalise Janke



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Letter from the Guest Editor

Todd Burkhardt
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The purpose behind this special edition of *ENGAGE!* was to capture perspective, understanding, and seminal work that was illuminated at the IU Statewide Community Engagement Unconference – Better Together – that was facilitated at IU Indianapolis by faculty, staff, and students from all IU campuses on March 22, 2024. Although a broad aspect of community engaged scholarship is presented, I think it is all contained under the larger picture of—we are better together. The power of relationships, trust, and transformative partnerships facilitate creativity, innovation, cultural humility, civic engagement, and impactful work. Articles within this special edition are expansive and range from models and best practices to the importance of community engagement as well as civic engagement to other articles that are reflective in nature. These are important and each piece, a fabric if you will, are woven into a beautiful tapestry of mosaics and gradations showing the intricacies, patience, and collectiveness of an underlying unified vision of community engagement encompassing research, creative activity, service, and teaching.

For some, community engagement is a calling. For others, maybe, it's an expectation. Either way, it's deeply rooted in collaboration, trust, authenticity, and wanting to serve something larger than oneself. In one of the articles in this special edition, Rafael Alamilla reflects on a statement by his undergraduate research mentor, Dr Jason Ng, who once stated "People who work at universities are servants to their communities." This statement epitomizes, but also grounds, our cohort of community engaged faculty, staff, and students. Our work is about collectiveness: the sharing of expertise and resources with the goal of reducing obstacles and increasing opportunities for Indiana residents across the state. Hopefully, IU—across its campuses and hierarchy—realizes that who we are and what we do contributes to the social, political, economic, and cultural larger footprint of serving the state and its people. This work is not transactiona; but is rooted in the concept of collaboration, and IU has increasingly embraced this role.

Over the past few years, I have seen continual growth and a groundswell of interest regarding engagement work with communities across Indiana. There is a deep commitment and passion regarding community engagement. Community engagement takes many forms, from research to creative activity, to teaching, to scholarship, to service. Tenure and non-tenure track faculty, professional staff, and undergrad and graduate students constitute the coalition of the willing—the community engaged cohort—who are impassioned about working with our communities whether they are urban, suburban, or rural.

Our focus and interest as a coalition of community engaged practitioners aligns and overlays across all three pillars of the IU 2030 Strategic Plan: student success, transformative research, and service to the state (https://strategicplan.iu.edu/index.html).

Based on the strategic plan, IU faculty and staff should institute and facilitate "immersive student experiences that elevate students among their peers in the workplace and beyond," have "a commitment to the pursuit of discovery, creativity, and innovation that improves communities and changes lives," and develop and enable "a commitment to engagement, partnership, and collaboration that strengthens the vitality of Indiana, the nation, and the world" (https://strategicplan.iu.edu/outcomes/index.html). Our IU community engaged cohort of faculty, staff, and students work diligently across and within all three pillars of IU's 2030 Plan. We create experiential learning opportunities and activities for students. We leverage networks and interdisciplinary collaboration. And we facilitate meaningful and impactful community-centric projects and initiatives as part of a campus-community collaborative partnership. We increase the vitality of Indiana and Indiana University through our work.

As a Center of Rural Engagement (IU Bloomington) staff member, I along with many others see the importance of further facilitating and hopefully even enhancing already established efforts by various schools and units across the university system by creating and facilitating opportunities for this community engaged cohort to grow and expand.

We did this through the orchestration of building networks, reducing silos, sharing best practices and initiatives, and reducing obstacles and barriers among the cohort that does community engagement work. There was an intentionality to unite our nine campuses around the importance of community engaged work in order to share lessons learned, highlight student immersive experiences, show impact and the importance of translation, as well as to highlight the lack of recognition and support for this important work by some faculty and administrators. This is further highlighted in an article penned by Annalise Janke who purports that the Unconference not only assuaged the geographical distances between campuses, but also reduced silos and barriers between faculty and staff on the same campus.

This community engagement coalition has met through various mediums: monthly zoom calls (cross campus connections), poster sessions, meet and greets, celebrations, colloquiums, an urban research conference, rural conferences, a research and dissemination webinar, unconferences, and the *ENGAGE!* Journal. The Unconference that took place this past March 2024 at IU Indianapolis was an opportunity to convene representatives from IU's campuses to share best practices in programming and models for working collaboratively with communities, explore opportunities for future multi-campus collaborations, and develop and strengthen IU networks. Case in point, is a co-written article in this edition by Kim Decker, Catherine Sherwood-Laughlin, and Suzanne Allen who through networking at the 2023 Unconference and Rural Conference discussed how their units from the School of Nursing, School of Public Health, and IU Corps could build and grow capacity with the implementation and evaluation of substance use prevention and mental health programs in rural schools.

Jennifer Price Mahoney who has contributed an article to this special edition points out that a striking feature of community engagement is that it helps all Hoosiers win, but not only that, Jennifer illuminates a salient point about the Unconference. "It gave us the opportunity to find our fellows. It was lovely to see and hear from others who are doing incredible and inspiring things in communities across the state."

The Unconference attempted to amass IU staff, faculty, and students from across the IU campuses around key and central topics that resonate, but also to continue to build momentum and turn ideas into positive action. Another important component regarding community engagement is developing our students so they are ready when handed the torch from the current generation of faculty and staff who do community engaged work. Karen Banks, who contributes an article on the importance of service learning for students, expresses the importance of such an endeavor, "because it allows students to work with real data, understand organizational challenges, and apply their new skills and knowledge" which is exponentially important to student experience, growth, and learning.

Both Rafael Alamilla and Elizabeth Bennion, in different articles, highlight the need for civic skill development and why that is so important. For Rafael, civically engaged professionals are seminal to the success of stakeholder networks and community capacity. And for Elizabeth Bennion, she illustrates how civic skill development as a part of community engagement can be developed across levels, modes, and disciplines. Moreover, Alexander Lipsey contributes a useful reflective essay on how tools such as Mentimeter (https://www.mentimeter.com/) can be an incredibly powerful for not only collecting important demographic information, but also important feedback on thoughts, questions, and inspirations that can be easily captured and shared in real time through visualizations, charts, and word clouds.

To highlight some of the ideas and conversations that transpired, we believed that a special edition of *ENGAGE!* could be realized to capture this important work by ways of reflection, collaboration, models, and best practices.

It was a way to fundamentally capture information and share it. For example, Rebecca Mueller's work is highlighted in her article, "Technical Assistance: A High-Touch, High-Impact Community Engagement Model" which demonstrates and shows that success is grounded in long-term relationships throughout the whole process from asset-based inventories to implementation to sustainability planning.

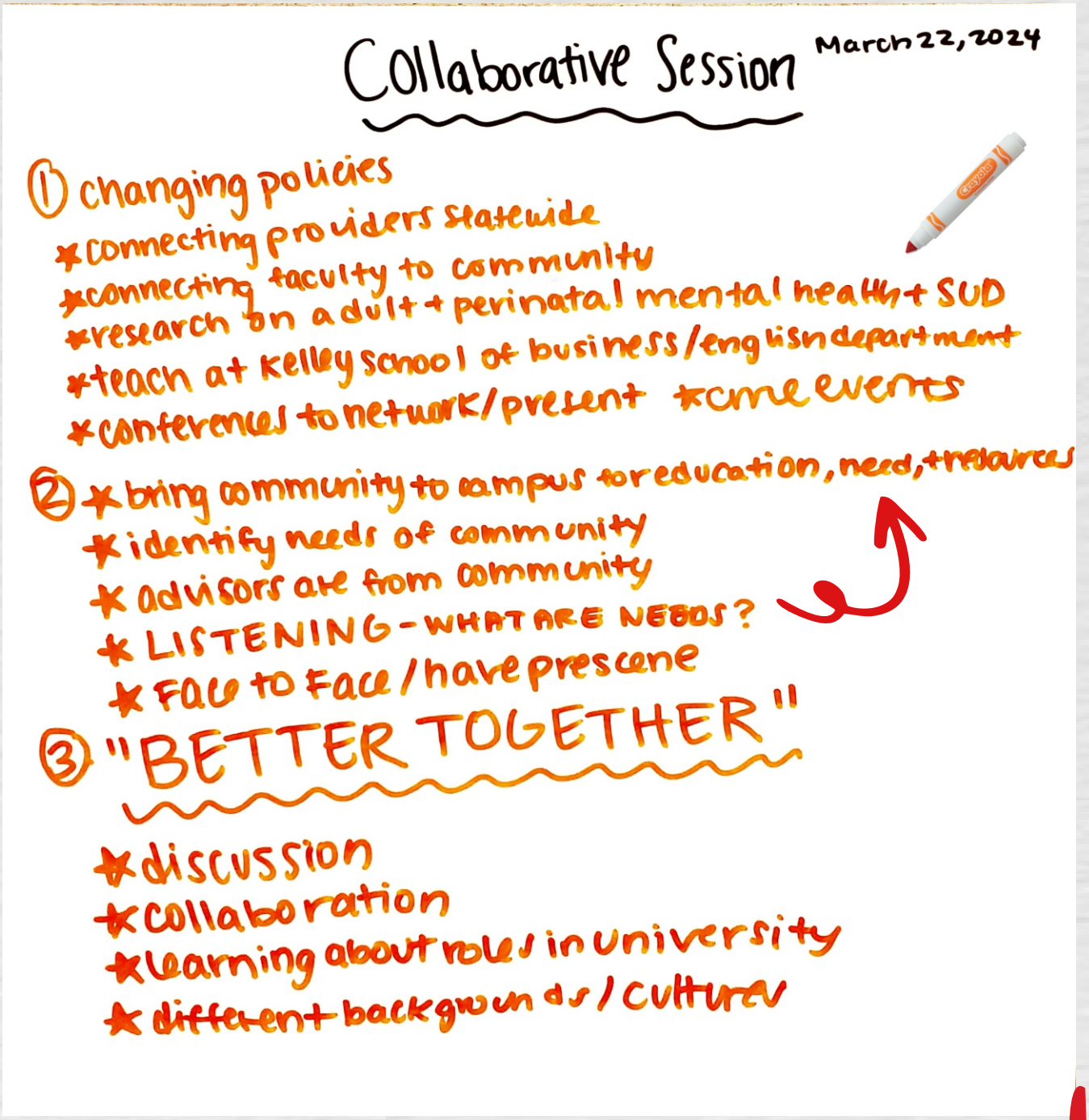
Of important note regarding the articles in this special edition is that they are all diverse and distinct from each other which I think is indicative of the nature of community engagement and the broad framework of disciplines, units, staff, faculty, students, and the communities that they work with. Jeremy Price who authors an article in this edition, coined this consortium of articles as pluralism or multiplicity. I couldn't agree more. The many facets, layers, and dimensions of this endeavor—community engaged work—are varied and diverse. It's the real world. It takes time. It's messy. It's complicated. But it's also beautiful. Jeremy in his work goes on to say, "Community engaged research prioritizes honoring community knowledge and capital, accepts diverse outputs, and values transformative goals," whereas this is not always the case in traditional research.

What do we—a non-land grant, Big Ten university—owe to the people beyond our campus boundaries? I would say a lot. Indiana University has a steeped tradition in research combined with a spectrum of doctoral programs in innovation and research.

Although this is incredibly important, this image doesn't paint the full picture of what Indiana University brings to the table. For many faculty, staff, and students it's about journeying off the campus and into communities across the state to meet people where they are and collaborate on opportunities and initiatives that make a difference.I hope that you enjoy this special edition. One thing is for sure. Our coalition of community engaged practitioners have been engaging in scholarly interdisciplinary work, establishing meaningful student immersive experiences, and serving our community partners and the state for decades.

Insights from the Statewide Conference

Conference attendees responded to prompts about IU and Community



(prompt responses con't)

Be a consistent partner.
- Facilitate connections & use of our tool kit to empower communities to effectively address issues.
- Engage students in these process – they learn collaboration & value of all diff. community actors.

3. Create space and infrastructure for collaboration.

&

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TOOLS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS (K-12)

EMPOWER TEACHERS AND FAMILIES

INCORPORATE COMMUNITY VOICE

PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

EQUALIZE POWER IMBALANCES
- FAMILIES FACULTY MODEL
- SHARED POWER

TWO-GENERATIONAL APPROACH
- LITERACY

SCALABILITY

TABLE TALKS

(prompt responses con't)

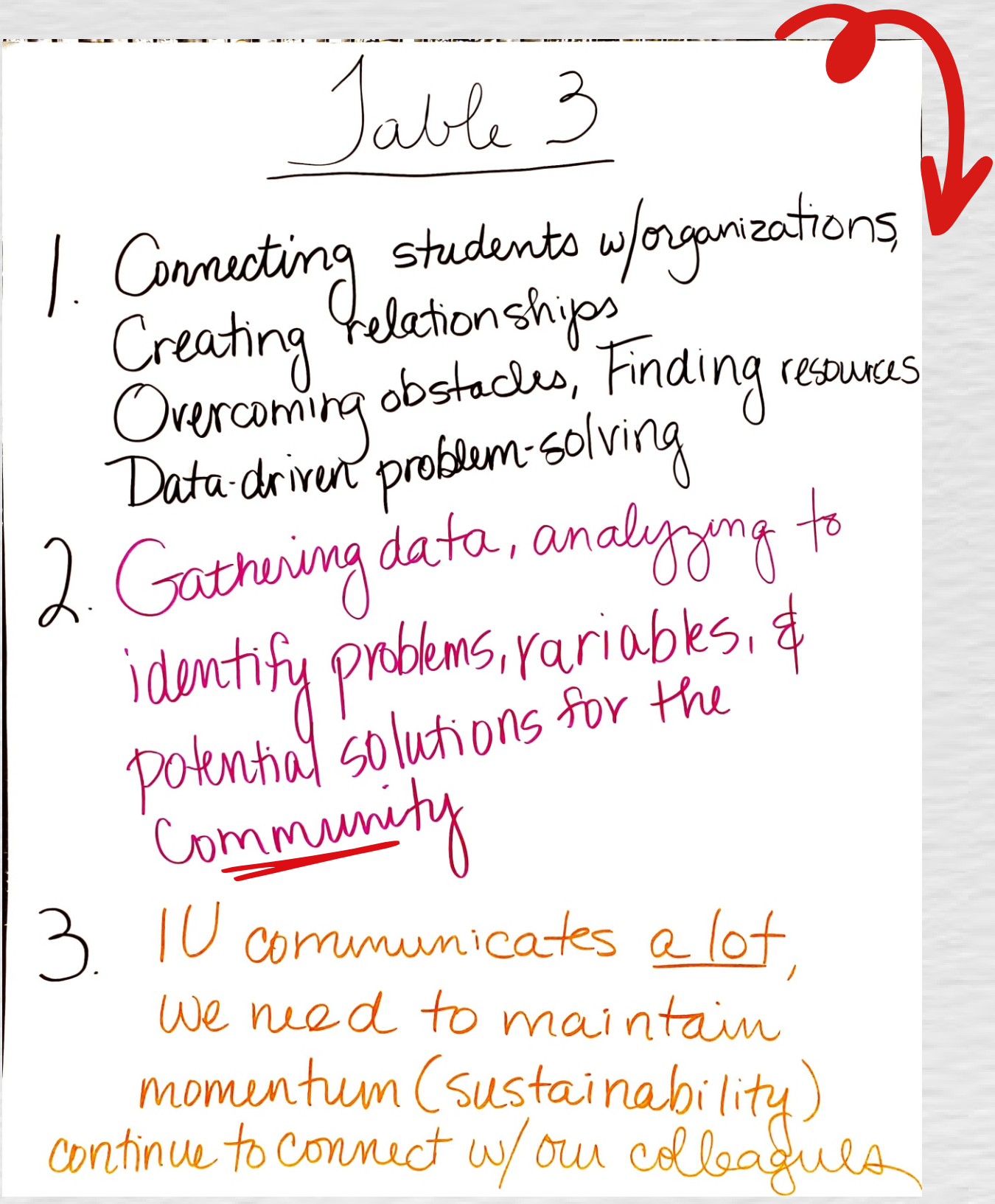


Table 3

1. Connecting students w/organizations, Creating relationships
Overcoming obstacles, Finding resources
Data-driven problem-solving
2. Gathering data, analyzing to identify problems, variables, & potential solutions for the Community
3. IU communicates a lot, we need to maintain momentum (sustainability) continue to connect w/ our colleagues

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Rituals of an Unconference: The Emergence of Anti-Structure Through the Liminality and Communitas of Community Engaged Scholars

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Bringing community engaged scholars together is always a worthwhile endeavor, to allow them to share their experiences, exchange their ideas and practices, and to commiserate around their concerns. The 2024 Unconference was one of these experiences, gathering like-minded researchers and scholars in one place to bond, find new contacts, and engage in important discussions and problem solving. At first glance, this appeared as a temporary community of engaged scholars and cultural workers constructed around shared practices and epistemological assumptions. Or was this experience and others like it, something else, even more powerful and transformative?

As an anthropology major in the 1990's, I was continually drawn back to the works of humanistic anthropologist Victor Turner. Reading Turner's *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1991), Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004), and Rabbi Arthur Green's *Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Naḥman of Bratslav* (1992) side-by-side my senior year in college was a transformative experience. It crystalized my expanding fascination with the active interplay between structure and agency, societal forces and individual freedoms, and the tensions between social progress and the preservation of traditions.

Years later, while crafting a theoretical framework for my doctoral dissertation, sitting in the warm Middle East sun in Jerusalem at an outdoor table at a café on Emek Rafa'im (Valley of Ghosts) Street, I once again wandered through Turner's work, specifically *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974). This exploration of his ethnographic works deepened my understanding of the historical and intellectual roots of modern symbolic interactionism and social practice theory.

Turner was particularly and personally significant at each of these moments as those were times when I found myself in a state of *liminality*. Turner defines liminality as in-betweenness, outside of the typical cultural and societal structures that keep one grounded in everydayness. Liminality is not meant to be a permanent place or time, where one can transcend and live outside of structure, but rather a phase in which one can become transformed and then participate in bringing about broader cultural shifts. Liminality is a process of becoming, growing, and transforming in which the individual actor adopts new ways of being and doing by uncovering new ideas and practices through experience and exchange to bring that new knowledge and ways of doing back to their ordinary, everyday lives.

Much like Campbell's hero's journey in which the protagonist is transformed by acquiring boons and attaching oneself to a guide, liminality is not a solitary event. Encountering others undergoing parallel liminal experiences can result in *communitas*. Communitas develops through a shared experience of liminality so that a fluid network rooted in practice and experience emerges, joining people together in solidarity to develop, grow, create, and imagine possibilities.

Everyday life is grounded in structure, reflecting "patterned arrangements of role-sets, status-sets, and status-sequences consciously recognized and regularly operative in a given society" (Turner, 1974, p. 237). From the shared time, experiences, and relationships of liminality and communitas, *anti-structure* emerges. As much as antimatter in physics does not mean there is an absence of matter, antistructure does not mean there is an absence of structure. Rather than representing prescribed patterned arrangements as structure does, antistructure emerges through experiences of liminality and communitas.

Community engaged research is in many ways a network of liminal practices and epistemologies compared to the structure of traditional forms of scholarship in the academy. While traditional research prioritizes documenting, controlling, and predicting, community engaged research is inter- and transdisciplinary, pragmatic, and locally focused. Community engaged research prioritizes honoring community knowledge and capital, accepts diverse outputs, and values transformative goals. This stands in contrast to traditional research's reliance on gatekeeping and abstract metrics.

Compared to the structures encoded into how we carry ourselves in our everyday disciplinary or departmental settings, community engaged research—as liminal assemblages of practices, epistemologies, and values—is a set of networks and relationships that allow for the emergence of anti-structure and the opening of possibilities. Co-constructing and navigating the anti-structure of community engaged research doesn't always lead to the traditional measure of academic success – that ill-defined concept of "reputation." Instead, it offers the potential for real transformation, benefiting both the communities involved and the research teams themselves.

The Unconference provided those of us in the liminal status that community engaged research practices engender a hearth to gather around in communitas. In gathering around this hearth, we sat and shared stories and concerns to support each other, knowing we are not alone in our endeavors even if it feels that way within the structures of our home departments, disciplines, and offices. In gathering around this hearth, we stood and discussed and planned an agenda to be with communities, reaching in partnership through research and ongoing work with the goal of bending structure to reflect the justice, equity, health, and wellbeing that we know is possible.

We know it is possible because, in our liminal space of communitas, we imagined it together. That same senior year in the 1990's, I took an archaeology class to fulfill the "Four Fields" requirement of my anthropology major. As an introduction, we read David Macaulay's *Motel of the Mysteries* (1979) which documented an imagined future where the world as it is now was buried in junk mail, uncovered and analyzed by archaeologists of the future. If archaeologists were to uncover that ballroom in Indianapolis on that day, frozen in time, I wonder what they would see? How they would interpret this assembly at the physical fringes of the campus, would they see a small village at the outskirts of a larger settlement on the banks of a slow moving river? A gathering of magicians or healers? A guild of thieves? The performance of a cult ritual meant to usher in the rains of spring?

While traditional research prioritizes documenting, controlling, and predicting, community engaged research is inter- and transdisciplinary, pragmatic, and locally focused.

I write this knowing that these interpretations would only make sense if future archaeology was undergirded by the same arrogance that is a hallmark of contemporary science and social science.

Such assumptions and interpretations should be problematic now and in the future. Instead, I hope the archaeologists would recognize the evidence of anti-structure in that ballroom, the distributed nature of knowledge and authority, and the work being done to co-construct and co- facilitate mutually transformational infrastructures and practices for equity, justice, honor, and wellbeing for all communities.

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Technical Assistance: A High-Touch, High-Impact Community Engagement Model

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My organization, Prevention Insights at the IU Bloomington School of Public Health, works to address the addictions crisis here in Indiana and nationally. I work closely with clients and communities around the state in my role as a Prevention Insights technical assistance specialist. Technical assistance (TA) is defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as "the process of providing targeted support to an organization with a development need or problem, which is typically delivered over an extended period of time" (CDC, 2018). Not to be confused with one-off or as-needed tech support, the Prevention Insights TA model is grounded in long-term relationships. We support prevention organizations with "technical assistance, coaching, and support" from the earliest stages of needs assessment, staff and organizational capacity building, and strategic planning; through the implementation of community-based strategies, evaluation, outcome dissemination, and sustainability planning.

We also build fruitful partnerships with our clients as we follow them over months or years, share resources and opportunities, point out themes and takeaways we observe in their work, and explore possible enhancements together.

Prevention Insights TA specialists share our expertise in addiction science, evidence-based strategies, and program fidelity, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and our clients' local efforts. We also build fruitful partnerships with our clients as we follow them over months or years, share resources and opportunities, point out themes and takeaways we observe in their work, and explore possible enhancements together. We challenge them to adopt best practices, provide high-quality programs and services to their communities, and achieve measurable outcomes. We celebrate when our clients write a successful grant proposal, gain the support of a county council member, or experience a breakthrough with that disengaged student in the back of the classroom. And we reflect together on complex issues, from local politics and conflicts with partners to the community tragedies of natural disaster, youth overdose or suicide.

In February, I attended an IU Coaching Conversations training aimed at academic advisors and other student-facing professionals. The training was very relevant to my work as a technical assistance specialist. Like students, our TA clients often come to us—and to Indiana University, which we represent—for answers.

Our primary task is to listen closely, explore their questions deeply, provide space for brainstorming, and assist them in recognizing that they and their stakeholders are the experts in identifying community strengths and determining an approach to planning, decision-making, and implementation suited to their local context.

As a premier institution of higher learning, Indiana University has an obligation to ensure that our work contributes to the public good. Our leadership has demonstrated their commitment to this with the IU 2030 Strategic Plan's Goal 3: Service to Our State and Beyond. IU Prevention Insights' intensive, tailored technical assistance model is a high-touch, high-impact approach to community engagement that could be scaled up elsewhere at IU. High-quality TA service provision by IU experts has the potential to benefit professionals and organizations in any sector.

The Prevention Insights TA model also benefits Indiana University. In reference to IU 2030 Goal 2: Transformative Research and Creativity, TA clients—or their partners—could be enlisted in Community-Based Participatory Research (NRC-RIM, n.d.) to further our understanding of community-based processes and strengthen the evidence basis for specific solutions. Formal research aside, the numerous, long-term community connections built through TA service provision afford an invaluable "bird's-eye view" of real communities.Our Prevention Insights team reflects regularly on trends and common challenges we observe across Indiana, continually adding to our collective wisdom on how communities respond to those challenges, what works, and what doesn't. Ultimately, TA service, like many other forms of service, involves its practitioners in community-engaged learning, and this learning can continually inform and improve IU's service to our state.

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A Menu-Based Approach to Civic Skill Development and Community Engagement in Courses Across Levels, Modes, and Disciplines

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Developing this generation's civic skills is vital to maintaining and strengthening the foundation of democracy. There is an urgent need to improve civic education and promote civic literacy, knowledge, and engagement among today's college students. This is something faculty can promote across the disciplines.

Meanwhile, higher education institutions are under rising pressure to increase the number and variety of online courses. Accelerated by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the issues of enrollment declines, budget cuts, financial pressures, and market demand are bolstering online course offerings at campuses across the country (Hall 2023). What does this mean for civic literacy and skill development? Can civic literacy, skills, and engagement be promoted in 100% online courses? And how can face-to-face and online courses incorporate civic skills training without sacrificing necessary class time or content required by departments or accrediting bodies? Is there a quick and easy way to introduce students in all disciplines and course levels to the core civic skills they will require after graduation?

I argue that the answer is yes!

This brief essay explains how a menu-based approach to civic literacy offers opportunities for student civic engagement in their communities – and from the convenience of their homes.

While community-based learning advocates recognize the many advantages of well-designed, reciprocal, long-term partnerships that benefit student learners and community partners, there is some evidence that online learning can facilitate, rather than inhibit, community-engaged pedagogies (Guthrie & McCracken, 2012; Purcell, 2017). Indeed, one study concluded that "e-service-learning—the marriage of online learning and service-learning—holds the potential to transform both endeavors by freeing service-learning from geographical constraints and by equipping online learning with a tool to promote engagement" (Waldner et al., 2012, p. 145).

I offer such an approach to students taking political science courses at IU South Bend. It is an approach that can be used in other courses across the disciplines with students across the state and nation. I adopted and adapted a model pioneered by political scientist Judithanne McLauchlan (McLauchlan 2019) to include more online-only assignment options during the COVID-19 pandemic and continue incorporating both online and in-person civic action projects in my courses.

In addition to audio/video lectures, readings, films, and multimedia materials reinforced through worksheets, quizzes, and discussion forums, I also require a series of hands-on civic engagement activities for all students.

Students can deepen their understanding of American government, politics, and political culture by completing a series of civics assignments and writing short reflection papers. In these papers, students describe what they did for their project, and what they learned about politics, the community, and themselves, as well as how the project may influence their future behavior. The reports can be very brief (1-4 pages) and can require students to relate what they learned from the experience to the material covered in lectures and in the assigned readings. An instructor may also require that students participate in discussion boards using the campus learning management system (e.g., Canvas) to post about their civics projects and respond to others. Students can be asked to complete several projects based on course learning objectives and available time.

At a time of democratic backsliding characterized by political polarization, negative partisanship, disinformation, and high levels of distrust in government (and fellow citizens), helping students to understand that they can become informed political actors who engage in ways that benefit their local community is critical.

The "menu" of potential civics projects includes activities such as attending a city council, school board, or county commission meeting; attending a homeowner's association meeting; volunteering for a community agency; visiting a federal or state courthouse and watching the proceedings; volunteering for a political campaign; and contacting an elected official about an issue of interest. Students verify their completion of the civics projects by including an appendix with photos of them at the events and/or scans of business cards, meeting agendas, or other artifacts of the civic engagement activity.

Online activities can be verified through screenshots, abbreviated transcripts, timestamps, and email messages from (or contact information for) interview subjects and volunteer coordinators. Specific post-activity assignment requirements also help to assure students that all members of the class are doing the work.

During ordinary semesters, my primary goal is to get people out from behind their keyboards and computer screens and out into their communities – and to introduce students to opportunities for engagement available to them after graduation. For this reason, no two assignments can be of the same type (e.g., only one city council meeting), and, prior to the Spring 2020 semester, only one of the civics projects could be "online" (e.g., watching an Indiana Supreme Court oral argument online or watching a Sunday morning political TV show). However, the requirements are easy to adapt to specific CDC guidelines for social distancing or individual students needs or limitations related to childcare, transportation, medical challenges, or other factors.

Even when a public health crisis, or other circumstance, has confined students to their homes, students can analyze a political talk show, comment on a federal rule change, write a letter to the editor, or conduct a Zoom interview with an elected official. They can make phone calls for a political campaign, watch a local government meeting online, or listen to an oral argument in front of their state's Supreme Court. These are just a few of the ways that students can observe, analyze, and engage in politics in action. See my online list of Citizen Action Project COVID-19 Adaptations here for a more comprehensive listing of examples.

Such projects expand students' understanding of the political world around them and their vision of how they can participate in representative democracy now and in the future. At a time of democratic backsliding characterized by political polarization, negative partisanship, disinformation, and high

levels of distrust in government (and fellow citizens), helping students to understand that they can become informed political actors who engage in ways that benefit their local community is critical.

Over the years, my students have written to their U.S. senator and representative, governor, state legislators, commented on federal rule changes, submitted op eds to their local newspapers, analyzed the oral arguments of court cases of special interest. They have attended school board, city council, and county council meetings and volunteered for service agencies and political campaigns – often bringing family members with them generating new and important conversations in the household. Some have even joined their local homeowners or neighborhood associations, and run for leadership posts in these organizations, after attending for the first time for class credit. Students sometimes fall short in analyzing an oral argument or following the correct procedure to submit a letter to the editor, but these are teachable moments, allowing opportunities for detailed feedback and project revisions. Such cases are quickly overshadowed by students who become politically active after meeting with a local party chair or add a journalism minor after interviewing a political journalist or watching a taping of the weekly public affairs TV program I host for a local PBS affiliate.

Now that the pandemic is over, opportunities for face-to-face engagement abound, limited only by the imagination of the instructors and students dreaming up new ways to practice civic skills by connecting classroom learning to meaningful experiences online and in the community beyond our computer screens. Individual professors can adapt assignments to focus on topics and skills of high relevance for specific classes and disciplines and determine the appropriate number of projects and ratio of online versus community-based activities.

Available time, resources, training requirements, partnerships, course level, and learning goals will influence the menu options and course requirements, but instructors and students need not invest an entire semester to become acquainted with – and practice – important civic activities that will benefit them, and the broader society, as they continue to use these skills – and develop new skills – as they practice political, civic, and community engagement over time.

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Reflections on the Community Engagement Unconference: Helping All Hoosiers Win

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The Community Engagement Unconference was a validating and encouraging experience for me. I have been involved in community engagement throughout my entire IU career, but often I feel rather isolated in this work. Our university is so large, and we receive so much information that we are overwhelmed and lost when we try to connect with others who are doing community engagement. The Unconference gave us the opportunity to find our fellows. It was lovely to see and hear from others who are doing incredible and inspiring things in communities across the state.

I appreciated hearing from administrators, faculty, staff, and students who are facing similar challenges, but even more, I loved hearing about their strategies, best practices, and resources.

We cannot go into a community with a deficit mentality, assuming we know what it needs. We must go in to “listen and listen again,” asking questions not only about the community’s needs, but also about its strengths.

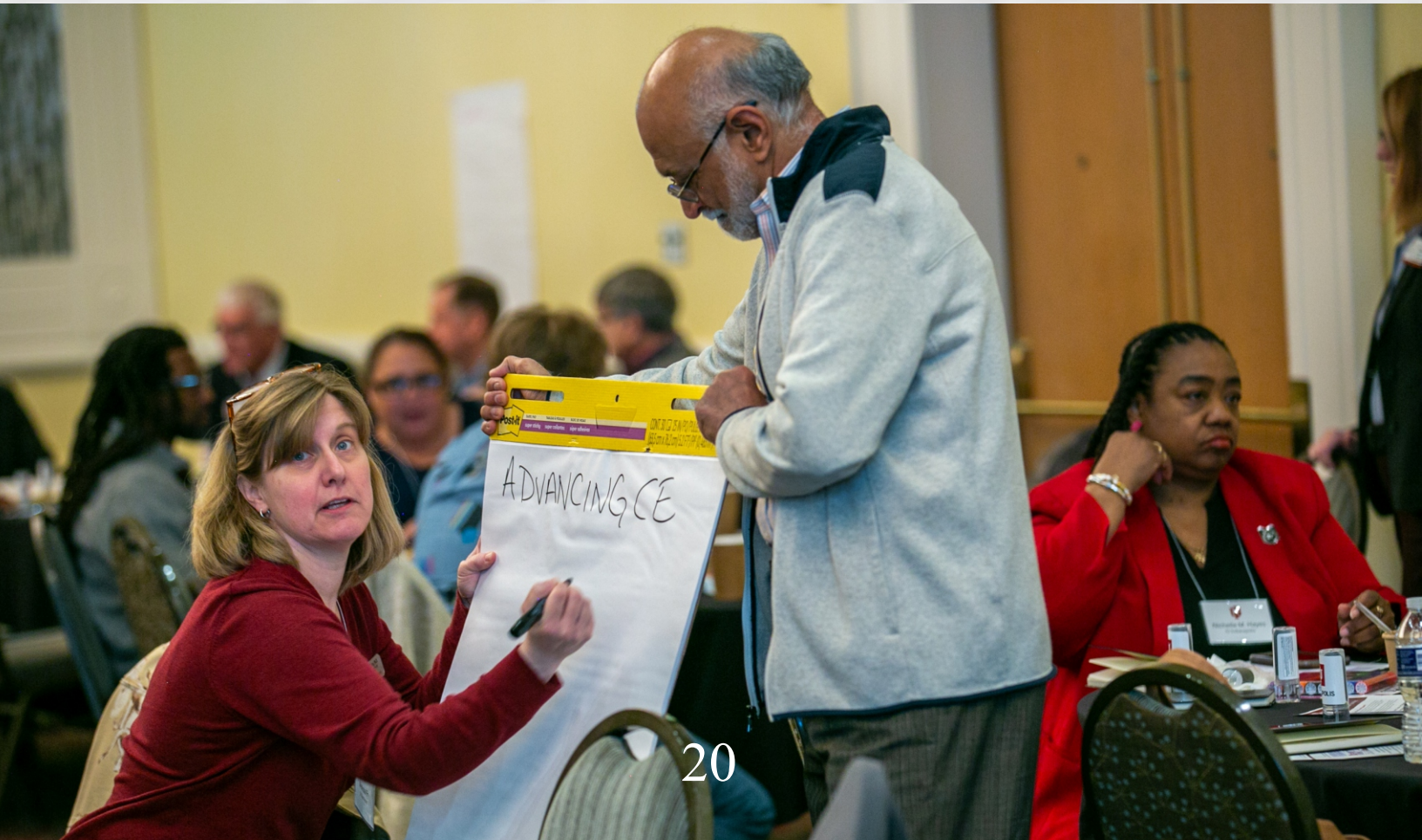
Some put names to things I had experienced but never named myself. One of these was "cultural humility," a term that resonated deeply with me as a fundamental value we must incorporate into every community engagement initiative. Back in my undergraduate days, community engagement was a very different animal; we approached with a "we-can-fix-your-problems" mentality. Thankfully, we know better now. We cannot go into a community with a deficit mentality, assuming we know what it needs. We must go in to "listen and listen again," asking questions not only about the community's needs, but also about its strengths.

Another invaluable aspect of the Unconference was the openness and creativity it encouraged. Rather than stodgily defending their "territory" or their "discipline," faculty were offering new, groundbreaking ideas to tackle big problems without being constrained by traditional notions of academia. campuses, and across the state. We have so much to offer our students, our state, our nation, and our world. Staying married to how things have always been done will limit us to a future that is no better than our past. I was greatly heartened to hear faculty and administrators voicing innovative ideas to collaborate across departments, across campuses, and across the state.

Finally, I was energized by talking to people who are just as passionate as I am about making real change. Our university provides us with so many resources and opportunities to address serious issues like educational inequality, healthcare access, food deserts, climate change, water pollution, and racial injustice.

We still face many challenges in supporting and assessing our work. High-impact practices, such as service learning and community-based projects, require more time, energy, and emotional investment than the traditional lecture-discussion-test mode of teaching; the substantial work we put in is difficult to reflect in our annual reviews or promotion and tenure dossiers. Still, I left the Unconference feeling optimistic about where we are going as a university and what we can accomplish. After 23 years working with students on community-based research and service projects, I am more hopeful than ever that this work is valued and valuable, and our students will use their experiences to make a better future for all of us.

All of our campuses – from Bloomington to Indianapolis, from South Bend to Kokomo – have experience, expertise, and energy that we can use toward making all our communities stronger, healthier, and more prosperous. Working together, we can accomplish so much more to help all Hoosiers, not just those of us wearing red and white.



Be Better Together: Importance of Institution and Network Building

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Networking is the "action or process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts" (Momentum Management Consulting, 2022). Network building, related to public health nursing, involves the process of bringing people, with common interests, together to accomplish specific tasks or goals related to addressing a public health need. To ensure the network building process is implemented to meet the tasks or goals, it is imperative that the information shared with appropriate and relevant colleagues piques their interests and desires to support the public health need. This manuscript describes a community-based public health nursing intervention and the process of building a network to support the goals of the project (Indiana University School of Nursing Bloomington, n.d.).

In 2015, the Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) School of Nursing (SON) received a donor gift with the task of creating an interprofessional community health education project to meet the health needs in south central Indiana.

The project leaders reached out to already established community and academic partners to gauge interest in collaborating on the implementation of a needs assessment and the development of an intervention based on the results. The outcome was the development of an advisory committee that included individuals from social service agencies, schools, health care, county health departments, along with faculty, students and professional staff from nursing, public health, brain and psychological sciences, education, and social work. The primary result from the needs assessment were concerns around substance abuse and a need for more mental health resources. Since 2015, the advisory committee has served to support the implementation and evaluation of substance use prevention and mental health programs in rural school-based settings. To date, the program has been implemented by 201 college students from multiple degree programs in six county school systems reaching over 6,637 elementary-level students.

The advisory committee continues to meet monthly to support the efforts of the SON's implementation and evaluation of the program in schools. The committee specifically provides feedback about the implementation of evidence-based programs, successes and challenges implementing the program in schools, ensuring the information and skills the students learn are developmentally relevant, and address current trends. Over time, new members have joined the advisory committee based on the results of the evaluations and in-depth discussions to ensure the sustainability of the program.

The longevity of the advisory committee and the continual recruitment of members from related disciplines to join the committee have supported the sustainability of the program.

One example is the addition of an expert in rural health and community capacity building from the IUB Center for Rural Engagement. This allowed the exploration of securing additional funding to provide the financial support of IUB graduate student interns and purchasing program materials to provide the program at no cost to the school corporations. Another example was the addition of a doctoral student from the School of Education to support the needs related to classroom management, a significant challenge for the facilitators. The CRE's Unconference led to the expansion of the team through a conversation between the advisory committee's chair and the IU Corps Director to develop a plan to recruit additional college students from other disciplines to be trained as facilitators and become part of the interdisciplinary team implementing the program in fall 2024.

The longevity of the advisory committee and the continual recruitment of members from related disciplines to join the committee have supported the sustainability of the program. These efforts have provided educational opportunities for youth in rural elementary schools to learn about the negative outcomes of substance use and learn skills to support their mental health. The initial funding from a donor to the IUB SON has led to the implementation of a program that addresses the health and wellness needs of rural youth.

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Using First-Year Students to Harness Data

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Data is a crucial asset for every business or organization, but the ability to effectively manage it varies widely. Some organizations rely on volunteers to manually input and summarize data, while others may not collect or utilize data due to lack of skilled personnel, causing them to miss out on opportunities to showcase their achievements. Organizations need assistance in addressing their data challenges, while students require access to real-world data to develop their skills. Engaging in community projects provides students with valuable practice, skills, and knowledge necessary for internships or jobs.

Data systems often operate behind the scenes. For example, when customers purchase items at Target, they are unaware that the transactional database manages that data. Information systems enable organizations to gather, store, analyze, and distribute data. Local governments and non-profits need help with simple data projects due to a lack of knowledge of what is possible and a lack of data skills. Simple tasks of collecting, cleansing, organizing, structuring, and summarizing data, and producing reports and charts are valuable skills for students and essential data needs for local governments and non-profit organizations.

Can first-year students with little to no business or data experience provide value to community projects? Yes, they can, and they do. At the Kelley School of Business, the BUS-K 204 Honors class students spend the first part of the semester learning about data and information systems. Towards the end of the semester, the students watch a video of a client interview and then have a video meeting with the client to understand their needs.

"Local governments and non-profits need help with simple data projects due to a lack of knowledge of what is possible and a lack of data skills."

Following this, the students work in teams to complete a series of assignments to create an information system. While the client may share some actual data with the students, they also learn how to create mock data to demonstrate the system to the client.

The regular class K201, "The Computer in Business" class, could benefit by working part of the project.

> "First-year students should participate in service learning because it allows them to work with real data, understand organizational challenges, and apply their new skills and knowledge."

With approximately 400 students working in teams of six, a Power Automate system was developed to allow students to ask the client questions indirectly. All students can view the questions and the client's responses. This system prevents students from overwhelming the client by directly contacting them, while still enabling them to ask questions. At the end of the semester, the client can choose to implement a system created by the students. Faculty members are responsible for making any necessary updates to the system, importing the client's actual data, and ensuring that the system is operational for the client. The faculty answer clients' questions and solve problems for one year.

IU Health Hospice needed a system to help manage volunteer visits to their clients. Volunteers would travel to a client's home, spend time with them, engage in activities, and provide the caregivers with a break. For each visit, specific data needed to be recorded, including the volunteer's mileage, visit duration, COVID-related information, activities during the visit, and general information about the client's mental health. Volunteers used to submit this information verbally, through email, or in a Word document, which required additional effort to retype and summarize the data for reporting purposes.

First-year students worked in teams of six to create a system where volunteers could input the required information using Microsoft Forms on their phones or computers. The IU Hospice manager would then download that data in an Excel file and import it into a database with the click of a button. Another button could be pressed to generate a report summarizing volunteer visits by quarter or year. When onboarding a new volunteer, the manager could use a form to input their information, and another button could be pressed to create a report summarizing all volunteers.

First-year students should participate in service learning because it allows them to work with real data, understand organizational challenges, and apply their new skills and knowledge. Students can complete competencies based on the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Goals such as:

- Professionally advocate for oneself and others.
- Employ active listening, persuasion, and influencing skills.
- Make decisions and solve problems using sound, inclusive reasoning and judgement.
- Keep an open mind to diverse ideas and new ways of thinking.
- Motivate and inspire others by encouraging them and by building mutual trust.
- Be present and prepared.
- Collaborate with others to achieve common goals.

This experience helps students identify gaps in their knowledge while also motivating them by showing that their work has a real-world impact. By creating systems for clients, students can see the tangible benefits of their efforts, beyond just receiving a grade. Additionally, working in teams allows students to connect with their peers and make long-term friends, while also learning the importance of communication and documentation in collaborative work for the smooth functioning of their team.

Speaking Up and Speaking Out: Community Engagement as a Civically-Engaged Professional

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One of the most influential statements I was ever told came from my old undergraduate research mentor Dr. Jason Ng: "People who work at universities are servants to their communities." While it took me a few years to fully realize what he meant by that statement, it has always stuck with me because of the significance of its implications. Fast forward five years later, I now realize that this statement has inherently guided my philosophy around what I do as a community–based researcher—and underpins everything that I do as a professional.

What it means for me to be a community-based researcher has evolved over the years. The importance of community was instilled in me from my culture and my upbringing in a Mexican-immigrant community. Admittedly though, I had no idea how this mentality and culture could be channeled into research until after I began my Ph.D. It took the COVID-19 pandemic and living in a city with significant health disparities (Brantley, 2018) for me to truly understand the importance of community engagement.

Community engagement is at the core of my work nowadays—with the primary aim being to build stakeholder networks and community capacity to promote physical activity (PA) for underrepresented racial minority (i.e., Black, Latino, etc.) adults.

Our team partners extensively with local health-based groups to facilitate community engagement around PA and promote healthy behaviors. Our overarching goal is to promote positive long-term health behaviors that reduce the risk of disease for individuals and foster healthier communities.

Advancing and fostering community engagement to me is not just about doing research with communities. To me, true community engagement requires civic engagement in the various domains of day-to-day life. It requires me to take on the role of a servant leader (Greenleaf, 1977) that helps build bridges; empower others; and see to it that the generations of accumulated knowledge discovered through scientific exploration be transferred to the communities that I serve.

> At its core, community-engaged research is about serving others. It is about using the privilege, knowledge, and resources I have disposable to me as an academic to make direct, tangible impacts on people's lives. Community engagement is also about fostering mutually beneficial relationships and passing on the tools and resources necessary for communities to thrive.

Working with our community partners has taught me that it is not enough to merely publish papers and stay in our ivory towers hoping that our work somehow trickles down to the general public. Rather, I must take on the responsibility of directly engaging with communities on a variety of levels. These efforts for me include advocating for health policies in our local/state governments (Alamilla, Keith, et al., 2023; Broz, 2023), serving on community committees, or taking the time to disseminate science in a way that is understandable to the layperson (Alamilla, Georgiadis, et al., 2023; Alamilla & Keith, 2021). It is vital that I make every effort to be engaged in my community and advocate for decisions that benefit the health of my community.

At its core, community engaged research is about serving others. It is about using the privilege, knowledge, and resources I have disposable to me as an academic to make direct, tangible impacts on people's lives. Community engagement is also about fostering mutually beneficial relationships and passing on the tools and resources necessary for communities to thrive. Community engagement should not be seen as a trendy buzzword that panders to broader academia—but rather as a serious call for active participation in the day-to-day lives of those touched by a university's reach. Universities and those who work within them have real potential to make tangible, positive impacts in communities—it is up to us to decide if we will spark those changes into fruition.

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Speaking Up and Speaking Out: Call for Future Conference

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I cannot wait for next year, because I will surely be registering for the IU Community Engagement Unconference again. I believe the four assignment topics did a superb job at asking a diverse array of questions to get the voice and opinion of the participants that attended the conference as it relates to how their work is, and can be, applicable to community engagement. I resonated with prompt 2 and prompt 4 the most but see the value in prompt 1 and prompt 3.

Prompt 2 asked for participants to highlight a best practice or model that they have personally implemented regarding community engagement that has proven successful. I found this to be a real beard-scratcher because as a social worker there are many things that I have done regarding community engagement. Yet, of those things, which would I consider successful is dependent upon how success is defined. Consequently, I had to operantly define success to myself before I was able to continue. Deciding to respond to this prompt was monumental for me because I typically just go through the motions of things, believing action is enough. Prompt 2 helped me to realize that action and its resounding affect is to be valued.

Prompt 4 inquired upon participants to give their general thoughts about the Unconference, which includes the speakers, the interactions, the networking, etc. Because this was my first time attending I did not know what to expect, so having the opportunity to simply reflect and give my feedback about the experience was helpful. I got to experience something new during my attendance. I had never seen the Mentimeter app used, which was a remarkable way to get engagement from the audience while relaying their anonymous opinions about the topic being asked in real-time across the presenting screen for everyone to see. That alone was amazing to me because the conference was centered around how to engage the community, and they exhibited an assortment of ways to engage the attendees at the conference, while also promoting what can be done outside of the conference.

Prompt 1 asked participants how they see their work advancing community engagement, which is like Prompt 2 but with one key difference. Prompt 1 is asking what could be done, and Prompt 2 is asking what has been done. I found Prompt 2 easier than Prompt 1 because there are countless ways I feel like my work can advance community engagement, but it is all dependent upon and limited to the resources and funds I have available. Consequently, I favor Prompt 2 because I know all the things I have done and could put them on a Likert scale of how successful they were. I see the value in being able to think about the future and what could be done to improve it, but my mind finds it hard to put limiters on future prospects about how things could be done, or what could be done.

Prompt 3 probed participants to think about how does the IU system-wide effort, like the Unconference and other engagements, enable institution and network building to be better, together. This is a great prompt to get people's thoughts about how they think IU and things like it encourage growth in the institution and the networks that they are comprised up. Some people may feel very strongly that institutions are doing a lot to foster network building, while others may feel just as strongly that institutions are not doing enough. This prompt allows for a disconnect to be addressed if it exists somewhere. Otherwise, it allows people to highlight the actions of things being done so that people in places where it is not being done can become aware that it may be something that should be having done.

All the topics held value, and I am grateful for the opportunity to attend the spring 2024 Unconference to learn and foster connections with professors and individuals of like minds. I am sure next year will be just as good if not better. I would jump at the chance if there was an opportunity to help in the development of future Unconferences.

Speaking Up and Speaking Out: Unconference Planning

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While this segment is typically reserved for students, as a recent graduate and future law student, I believe that my proximity to student life offers a valuable perspective.

I joined the Center for Rural Engagement as the team's administrative project manager just days after my graduation in May 2023. It wasn't long before I heard of the looming "Unconference" event that I would help plan.

Initially, I was quite skeptical of the idea. In true Gen-Z fashion, I am used to relying on email, Zoom, and other forms of internet connection to bridge gaps. Much of my university experience, including my first day of freshman year, was spent in a Zoom classroom. Before too long, however, I began to see the need for an Unconference.

The breadth and reach of Indiana University is part of its beauty, but it can be overly Byzantine, too. Local campuses can feel disconnected and sometimes even rivalrous. There is a lack of a sense of unity and connectedness between campuses, units, departments, and even titles.

As a student, I was hardly cognizant of my fellow IU peers outside of Bloomington. Some departments and programs do a far better job at ensuring connection between geographic campuses, but overall, IU is lacking in this area. As a professional staff member, there can feel like an invisible wall between faculty and staff.

At the Unconference, all bets are off. From the very first planning stages, there is no hierarchy of importance, no pecking order. Of course, the experience that comes with time and achievement cannot and should not be ignored, but the Unconference celebrates the expertise and importance of each member regardless of title.

Looking around the room filled wall-to-wall with university members from many different walks of life, it was incredible to see the diversity of conversation and input. Watching folks from different campuses compare their experiences brought shared struggles to light, and interdisciplinary conversations led to some very creative ideas, including concocting a rich metaphor likening the Unconference work to dating.

Aside from the brilliant conversations that arose naturally from Unconference attendees, the programming of the event tackled difficult issues in a way I admired. Susan Sciame-Giesecke spoke on her prior experience leading a regional campus. She addressed the struggles and the strengths of regional campuses with refreshing honesty.

Dr. Sciame-Giesecke also spoke on the power that each of us have to impact the incredibly bureaucratic system that we exist within at IU in a way that encouraged and inspired the audience. Phaedra Corso discussed research at IU, which resulted in a passionate discussion on IU's blind spot toward community engaged research and a need for true change, communication, and transparency. I left the Unconference feeling refreshed and energized, which I believe should be the goal of every conference event. Watching my colleagues connect, ideate, and advance their positions inspires me to do the same.

While I am not actively engaging in community based research or directly working in communities, I support a team of incredible people who do, and in my future legal career, community-engaged work is of the utmost importance to me. I am grateful for the space the Unconference created for folks to connect without the barrier of a screen. The laughter and stories shared at the in-person sessions cultivated a familiarity that enriched the traditional Zoom meetings that continued on the next week.

Now more than ever, it is important for us to create spaces to connect across silos in person and online. I am thankful to have been a part of the Unconference, and I'm excited to begin working on its next iteration—the Statewide Indiana University Community Engaged Institute.

Watching folks from different campuses compare their experiences brought shared struggles to light, and interdisciplinary conversations led to some very creative ideas, including concocting a rich metaphor likening the Unconference work to dating.

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