Using a Bourdieusian Framework for Understanding Social Justice, Leadership, and
Community Engagement in Higher Education

Cynthia M. Veraldo and James W. Koschoreck
The University of Cincinnati
Abstract

Complex social conditions characterize many urban areas in the United States and institutions of higher education are frequently called upon to be a resource for improvement of these communities. Previous research tells us little about the role that senior level administrators play in the university-community engagement agenda. This qualitative pilot study uses interviews of five senior level administrators to investigate their role in community engagement, their social justice intentions, and the societal forces that affect their actions toward engagement. The data are analyzed using a framework of leadership for social justice as well as a Bourdieuan theoretical framework. This article provides evidence that senior level leaders play an important role in university-community engagement. Leaders recognize the principles of social justice as legitimate and valuable, but the application of these principles vary from person to person. Furthermore, history, politics, economics, and symbolic context influence the habitus of senior level leaders in university-community engagement.
Social Justice in Higher Education: A Case Study of Senior Level Leadership and Community Engagement

Passionate leadership is a highly internalized good. Only those who truly believe in redefining universities with a strong eye toward community engagement will be able to pull off a successful engagement agenda. You cannot fake engagement; do not even try. Either believe it in your heart of hearts, or take the institution somewhere else (Zimpher, 2006, p. 240).

Understanding the social justice intentions and the societal forces that impact senior level leadership at urban institutions of higher education has become increasingly important. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 2009 the poverty rate was at 14.3%, which was up from 13.2% in 2008 (Bishaw & Macartney, 2010). Most of the poverty is urban poverty; almost two-thirds of the poor in the U.S. live in central cities and “urbanized,” distressed suburbs (Anyon, 2005). Hundreds of researchers have concluded “concentrated poverty increases the likelihood of social isolation (from mainstream institutions), joblessness, dropping out of school, lower educational achievement, involvement in crime, unsuccessful behavioral development and delinquency among adolescents, non-marital childbirth, and unsuccessful family management” (Wilson, 2009, p. 46). As a result of political and economic changes, public resources and social support in poor urban neighborhoods appear to be diminishing. Universities in urban areas are often called upon to engage in and serve the communities in which they are located and senior level leaders at universities are urged to incorporate a community engagement agenda into their vision for their institution.

Universities have a historical tradition of engaging in communities to work on improving the complex social conditions of the poor. The Morrill Act of 1862 gave federal land to states in order to expand institutions of higher education for the purpose of connecting their knowledge
base particularly in the fields of agriculture, technology, and engineering to farmers in rural areas in their states. The university-community engagement did not take place in urban areas; nonetheless, it was an important connection and there was a mutual benefit. Land-grant universities had a “laboratory” for research and student learning, and rural farmers benefitted from the knowledge and resources of the university. Community engagement took place between agents of the universities and members of the rural communities.

In addition to rural examples of community engagement, there are important early examples of engagement in the urban context. In 1889, Jane Adams, co-founder of Hull House, welcomed faculty and students from the University of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin to work with her to conduct research on poverty, working conditions, and health issues in Chicago (Longo, 2007). Highlander Folk School, founded in 1932 by Myles Horton, was located in Tennessee and served as an educational center that cultivated civic leadership of rural leaders and industrial leaders through extensive partnerships with institutions of higher education (Longo, 2007). These are just a few of the very important historical examples of university-community engagement.

More recently, in 1995, former U.S. Commissioner of Education Ernest Boyer wrote “the scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems” (Longo, 2007, p. 37). Boyer emphasized the need for colleges and universities to become places for civic action. In a collective statement, a group of land-grant presidents declared that “universities must act not only as agents of democracy, but also as its architects by providing bridges between the civic aspirations of individuals and the public work of the broader world” (Longo, 2007, p. 139). Presidential announcements like these demonstrate a commitment from university leaders to engage in the local community for the
betterment of the world. Indeed, numerous community engagement efforts occur across college campuses, including local professional development initiatives, corporate collaborations, service learning, policy development, focused research, and philanthropic activities. Many campuses devote particular offices of community engagement that conduct, organize, and assess community engagement efforts of faculty, staff, students, clubs, and organizations. Coordinating the university-community engagement efforts is an important task for many college campuses in order to maximize efficiency and effectiveness of engagement initiatives.

Missing from the literature, however, are descriptions and analyses of the community engagement efforts of senior level university leaders. How do senior level university leaders engage with the local, urban community? Do senior level university leaders have social justice intentions for community engagement? What societal forces influence their engagement? The purpose of this study it to answer these questions and contribute to understanding the roles, intentions, and actions of senior leaders’ engagement in the community.

**Theoretical Background**

University leaders can become agents for societal transformation. The mission of the university and the vision of the president and other senior level leaders often influence the community engagement agenda. If the university is committed to community engagement and the leaders make these efforts a priority, societal transformation can be expansive. On the other hand, the priorities of the president and other senior level leaders may not focus on community engagement. Marshall and Oliva (2010) propose that moral transformative leadership not only promotes education as engagement in academic pursuits but also to create activists for the advancement of the democratic reconstruction of society. The university is saturated with resources – intellectual, social, cultural, political, and to some extent economic. The decision to
commit these valuable resources for the greater good of the community is the choice of senior level leaders. Brukhardt, Holland, Percy, and Zimpher (2006) suggest six promising practices that can help university leaders institutionalize engagement: 1) integration into the mission, 2) forging partnerships, 3) research and scholarship, 4) teaching and service learning, 5) recruitment and support of faculty and staff, and 6) create radical change. Our data confirm this assertion and we will demonstrate later and more specifically the roles that senior level leaders take on in a community engagement agenda.

   Understanding the intentions of senior level leaders can provide further understanding of university-community engagement. “Leadership for social justice investigates and poses solutions for issues that generate and reproduce societal inequities” (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 20). An influential concept connecting leaders with social justice intentions is Starratt’s (1994) multidimensional ethical framework, which incorporates care, justice, and critique to develop a human, ethical response to unethical and challenging environments particularly in the educational setting (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). In this investigation, the leadership experiences of senior level university administrators are analyzed to find out how they define leadership for social justice and whether or not they apply the principles of social justice to their own efforts of community engagement.

   To discover what contributes to action and decision making processes of senior level university leaders in a community engagement agenda, we think it is valuable to consider their habitus, a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) to mean “the interplay of free will and structures over time, dispositions shaped by past events and structures that shape current practices and structures and that also condition our very perceptions of these (p.170). Understanding the habitus of senior leaders provides a clearer understanding of their roles,
intentions, and actions in university-community engagement. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990),

Insofar as it defines the primordial conditions of production of the differences between *habitus*, the structure of class relations, regarded as a field of forces which expresses itself both in directly economic and political antagonisms and in a system of symbolic positions and oppositions, supplies the explanatory principle of the systematic characteristics which the practice of the agents of a determinate class takes on in the different areas of activity, even if that practice owes its specific form in each case to the laws proper to each of the sub-systems considered. (pp. 203 - 204)

So to consider the *habitus* of individual leaders, Bourdieu suggests looking at the influence of economics, politics, and symbolic contexts to uncover what influences practice. Additionally, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) would add historical influences to the list of the forces that contribute to *habitus*.

We must also take into account the particular past of the educational institution, whose relative autonomy is objectively expressed in its capacity at each moment in history to retranslate and interpret external demands in terms of the norms inherited from a relatively autonomous history. (pp. 146-147)

The statement suggests the importance of looking into the history of the educational institution of the leader; additionally it is important to look at the individual histories of the leaders as their own past contributes to decision making and action in the present. Emirbayer and Johnson (2008) have used a Bourdieusian framework to analyze organizations, and they purport that each leader in an organization brings to it a *habitus*, some of which is shared with other leaders and some of which is different. As they state,
Since different *habitus* structure judgment and practices in different ways and since the division of labor in most organizations results in the interaction of a variety of *habitus*, attention to the role of the *habitus* in organizational life promises to shed considerable light on how organizational structure is built up from the microprocesses of individual behavior. (p.4)

Understanding the societal forces that affect the *habitus* of senior level leaders promotes understanding of their leadership for social justice and thus the particular role they play in a community engagement agenda.

**Methods**

**Research Site**

This study was conducted at a public, urban-serving, doctoral research university with very high research activity (formerly Carnegie Classification of Research I). The site was chosen because of our knowledge of existing university-community engagement efforts, familiarity with its organizational structure, and access to senior level leaders. The mission statement of the university contains descriptors such as “urban,” “serves the people,” “engaged,” and “community” that point toward appropriateness of this site for study (not sure how to cite to protect confidentiality). The university is also a member of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, whose members are “actively working to address critical issues and to develop additional support for their communities” (Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, 2011, p. 3).

**Data Collection**

Five senior level university administrators\(^1\) were recruited to participate in this study. These included a diverse representation in terms of gender, ethnicity, and race.\(^2\) Each of the

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\(^1\) For purposes of this study, “senior level administrators” was defined to include—possibly—the president of the university, the provost, vice presidents, deans, and associate deans.
administrators participated in a series of three semi-structured interviews, each lasting 30 to 60 minutes. Seidman (2006) recommends in-depth, phenomenological interviewing which incorporates three interviews so that participants can fully reconstruct their experiences within the topic of study. He recommends that the first interview should be a focused life history, the second should cover the details of the experience, and the third should require the participants to reflect on the meaning of the experience. Hence, the first interview in our study was designed to gather information of a general nature, to establish rapport, and to focus on the past experiences that led to the present ideas each of the participants had regarding community engagement. With the second interview, we sought to understand the participants’ personal definitions of concepts relating to community engagement and to discuss how their current experiences reflect those definitions. Finally, with the third interview, we sought to explore the administrators’ understandings and meanings associated with leadership for social justice and how these might relate to community engagement.

The interviews were all conducted by the first author. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed by both investigators using a Bourdieusian framework that looks at how the historical, political, economic, and symbolic contexts influence the *habitus* of the participants towards university-community engagement (Mills & Gale, 2007).

**Ethical Considerations**

Since the participants are in senior level positions at the university—and are therefore highly visible and identifiable—we have elected to refer to them by pseudonyms. They will be referred to as Dr. Anderson, Dr. Brown, Dr. Carson, Dr. Daniel, and Dr. Evans. We have further chosen not to identify them by gender; therefore, in the analysis of the data, we use “he/she,”

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2 Due to the sensitive nature of maintaining the confidentiality of these particular participants, we have purposely chosen not to state the specific numbers in each of these categories.
“his/her,” and “him/her” in order to provide an additional level of anonymity. In this same regard, we will refer to them all throughout this study as “administrators,” “decision-makers,” or “senior leaders” rather than by their actual titles.

Data Analysis

Roles

The first research question asks “how do senior level university leaders engage with the local, urban community?” Throughout the interviews, it was apparent that all of the senior leaders played multiple roles in community engagement. We were able to gather the following list of roles that senior level leaders take on when engaging with the community. The roles directly correspond with the six promising practices suggested by Brukhardt, et. al, (2006) discussed in the introduction of this paper.

1. Integration into the mission
   a. Incorporate into strategic planning initiatives and documents
   b. Set the tone in speeches or printed materials

2. Forging partnerships
   a. Board and community organization memberships and partnerships
   b. Represent the university locally, in the state, federally, and globally

3. Research and scholarship
   a. Recognize and promote research and scholarship in and with the community
   b. Fund community engagement research and other initiatives

4. Teaching and service learning
   a. Create opportunities for faculty, staff, and student initiatives
   b. Coordinate efforts, channel activities, and make sure initiatives run smoothly
5. Recruitment and support of faculty and staff
   a. Hire faculty who also have a community focus in their research
   b. Create jobs and provide faculty and student development initiatives toward community engagement.

6. Create radical change
   a. Put structures in place for community engagement (i.e. offices and faculty and staff positions dedicated to community engagement, promotion and tenure for community engagement work)
   b. Live it in daily actions, intentions, and decisions.

The administrators value these roles and acknowledge the importance of these roles in a community engagement agenda. When speaking about the roles he/she pays in university-community engagement, Dr. Anderson responded “all of those (roles) are congruent with my values and I come at these passionately not just sitting down at a desk or a table with other people but knowing I have a role that I can play to make things better.” Dr. Daniel expressed excitement in engaging with the community and the importance of continuing those efforts when he/she said “so yes those are some examples of how my own participation in those interactions between universities and communities really makes me excited about that and want to continue with that kind of engagement.” The preceding quotes provide evidence that senior level leaders play a significant role in community engagement. When we first began the study, there was some hope that these administrators would be in the trenches working with the local, poor, urban community to solve everyday problems. There is some indication that senior level leaders do a little of this work; however in actuality, the roles they mostly perform are providing the
environment, connections, support, and resources so that others can carry out the university-community engagement efforts.

**Social Justice and Community Engagement**

In addition to understanding the roles of senior leaders in community engagement, an equally important inquiry is to understand why they may perform those specific roles. Our second research question seeks to answer whether or not senior level university leaders have social justice intentions for community engagement. We first chose to understand the participants' meanings of social justice. The following excerpts represent the various ways in which social justice was defined by the participants:

I guess I think of a just society [as] one where people get along and things are fair and people are treated fairly. (Dr. Brown)

Social justice, to me, is all about fairness, in a word. (Dr. Anderson)

To me social justice . . . is concern not just with equal opportunity, but rather a leveling of the playing field—and so everyone is on the playing field together. And then we can have an open market competition over whatever it is we are concerned with. (Dr. Carson)

[Social justice is] making sure that you have the courage to speak truth to power and make sure that people that don’t have the access and the opportunity and things to defend themselves are spoken for. And [to] make sure that you’re making just decisions and that your decisions are fair decisions. (Dr. Evans)
Clearly, the concepts of fairness and equality of opportunity provide a common thread of understanding for all these participants. Dr. Carson speaks of “leveling the playing field,” and Dr. Evans further defined social justice in terms of the responsibilities and courage of leaders “to speak truth to power.”

Despite these shared beliefs about the nature of social justice, we noted considerable disparity amongst the leaders regarding the relevance of applying the principles of social justice to their own efforts at community engagement. Both Dr. Brown and Dr. Daniel, for example, view the principles of social justice as undergirding many community engagement activities. Their own personal investment in social justice, though, is tenuous at best as they rely on the efforts of others to carry out those missions. Dr. Brown stated that he/she does not get involved directly in community engagement efforts in poor communities; rather, “we have people doing research in health disparities in underserved populations.” And speaking further about social justice, Dr. Daniel remarked:

Am I somebody who where this is a passion enough that I am a subject matter expert and that I write op-eds or asked to speak about these issues? No I’m not, so there are more powerful advocates for social change and justice than I.

Conversely, for others the commitment to social justice underlies virtually every aspect of their professional lives. Dr. Anderson, for instance, commented:

Integrators have a sense of duty, obligation, service to others, and they operate from that mentality. They have a sense of wholesomeness, togetherness, of all those things—fairness, and so forth—and I try to live those ideals. If I am in a community, I am in it. I have an obligation and a duty to make it a better place. Both the campus and my local
community. And I try to serve it in every way I know how. It is meaningful, and it is consistent with who I am.

At a different point in the interview, he/she elaborated on the importance of an integrated approach to social justice and community engagement.

I don’t know how to be part-way, so a principal motivator I have is to make that place that I live in as best as it can be, whether it’s my job or the community that I live in. And I try to do both sets of those things around a set of congruent values that I allow to blend all the time. . . . I want it to be a better place than how I found it in both regards.

Similarly, Dr. Carson, when asked whether his/her community engagement efforts are related to social justice, stated:

I think for me personally it’s been a theme in my career. But I also think a lot about social engagement from the students’ perspective because, of course, my job first and foremost is to serve the students so they can benefit from interacting with the community. I think in lots of ways that may or may not be tied to social justice issues.

For all the university leaders, then, the principles of social justice are recognized as legitimate and valuable. In the absence of a specific directive, however, the application of these principles varies from person to person. The following graphic represents the divergence in the application of social justice principals:
For some, the work of community engagement is inseparable from a worldview of social justice; for others, the work of social justice is more properly carried out by other leaders whose jobs are more clearly identified with those types of tasks. In the following section, we argue that societal forces also influence a senior level administrator’s actions and social justice intentions toward community engagement.

**Societal Forces**

The third research question asks “what societal forces influence senior level leaders’ community engagement?” We have chosen to analyze this study using Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, a term coined by Bourdieu (1984) to mean, “the interplay of free will and structures over time, dispositions shaped by past events and structures, that shape current practices and structures that also condition our very perceptions of these” (p.170). When using Bourdieusian methodology, Mills and Gale (2007) recommend “researchers to look at the dynamic interaction between individuals and the surroundings in which they find themselves and situate their accounts within a larger historical, political, economic, and symbolic context” (p. 440). The interaction of the four societal forces suggested by Mills and Gale (2007) takes place in what Bourdieu calls the field of power. The field of power is important because it informs the decision making process of leaders. “Any particular move or action undertaken is the product of the previous strategies of all parties and is reflective of each actor’s social position at the moment in question, within the overall power relations of the context” (Eacott, 2010, p. 276). The university represents the context. The participants are influenced by the decisions that have been made at the university before them, as well as the particular moment in which a new decision must be made.
This study looks at how the field of power represented as the societal forces of history, politics, and economics, as well as symbolic context affects the *habitus* of the participants toward university-community engagement. Figure B below represents how we see the societal forces working individually as well as simultaneously on the *habitus* of the leader.

**Interaction of Field of Power on Habitus**

![Diagram](image)

Figure B.

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend using a matrix to display and make sense of the data (e.g. categories and nodes) in a study. To provide a better understanding of each societal force in the field of power, we have designed a matrix (Figure C) to highlight specific influences within each category in the field of power that the participants mentioned in the interviews.
Influences within each Societal Force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Economics</th>
<th>Symbolic Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Leaders</td>
<td><strong>Including:</strong> • Higher education • Experiences in undergrad • Previous institutions • Current university</td>
<td><strong>Including:</strong> • Presidential attitude • Involvement on community boards • Personal and university benefit • Public relations • State and national positioning • Rankings</td>
<td><strong>Including:</strong> • Workforce and economic development • Resource benefit • Corporate partnerships • Budgetary concerns • Community needs</td>
<td><strong>Including:</strong> • Urban environment • Mission of the university • Core documents • Presidential goals • Social Networks</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Figure C.

To provide a better understanding of each societal force in the field of power and then the specific influences within those forces that each of the participants spoke about, we will describe each societal force individually. We will also provide excerpts from the data that provide evidence to support our understanding of these forces and influences. We will discuss the excerpts and how they relate to the *habitus* of the participant toward community engagement.

**History.** It is important to understand a leader’s history because it is that history which has brought the leader to the decision at that moment. Eacott (2010) contends that leadership actions should be placed in a social space; there is a need to understand the context of situations in relationship to historical events and experiences. In this study, history is represented in the data as the history of higher education, the participant’s experiences at their undergraduate
institution, experience of employment at previous institutions, and the historical experiences at
their current institution.

Some of the specific excerpts from the data that demonstrate this historical influence
include a statement by Dr. Anderson who described an undergraduate experience:

I saw in that experience as it was emerging in my career, the reciprocal nature of how the
institution and the community benefitted from one another’s presence, so my values got
shaped very early on in that and there were no barriers or boundaries between the campus
and the community.

Dr. Anderson learned very early on in his/her undergraduate experience that universities and
communities could benefit from engaging with each other and that there were no boundaries;
each was open to the other. This very early experience in higher education is compelling
evidence that contributes to his/her *habitus* toward community engagement.

Dr. Carson demonstrated a historical influence when he/she spoke of his/her former
professional experience at another institution: “I wanted to come here and take sort of the
philosophy of the land grant institution but implement it at an urban research university because I
really believe that is where you can have the greatest impact.” This excerpt might indicate a
more conscious effort rather than *habitus* toward community engagement; however, Dr. Carson
spoke a great deal about his/her experience at a land grant institution in which university-
community engagement is a part of the mission. In fact, the following quote really leads us to
conclude that his/her actions toward community engagement truly represent *habitus*: “I was
raised as a pup with that sort of university mission and so I think it’s sort of in my DNA as an
academic.” If something is “in my DNA,” it is always with me and I cannot change it. This led
us to conclude that Dr. Carson’s *habitus* (free will and structures over time) is toward university-community engagement.

Dr. Evans spoke about an experience in his/her first university job: “all of our projects were involved in working with the community and making a difference and we were always working with challenged populations.” Like Dr. Anderson and Dr. Carson, Dr. Evans experienced university-community engagement very early on in his/her academic career and from this quote, not only was Dr. Evans’ experience of community engagement early, but he/she says “all of our projects were involved in working with the community.” Therefore, it was not hit or miss; everything he/she did helped to contribute to his/her *habitus* toward community engagement. All three of these experiences demonstrate the important contribution of historical experiences on the *habitus* of these senior leaders toward community engagement.

**Politics.** In addition to historical influences, the politics of the university as well as the greater community influence the *habitus* of senior level leaders. Eacott (2011) claims that education is a political activity; educational leaders should perceive themselves as political players in an ideological struggle for power within the larger social order. Each of the participants in this study sees themselves as political players within the university as well as in the broader community. Politics in the field of power is represented in the data by former, as well as current presidential attitude regarding university community engagement, participant involvement on community and corporate boards of directors/trustees, personal and university benefits from community engagement, university public relations, state and national positioning of the university, and national rankings of the university.

The data clearly indicate there are political factors at work when university leaders choose which boards of directors/trustees to join. Dr. Daniel stated: “I think that high level
administrators tend to sit on wealthy boards, prominent boards and tend to be underrepresented on smaller, community oriented boards.” This quote was said in the context of who gets their voices heard by the university and how it was easier for the more prominent boards to be heard, because they had the ear of the university administrator due to their board membership. This statement is political because the smaller, less prominent and probably less powerful organizations are not likely to be represented or considered in decision making with regard to university-community engagement. The wealthier boards have more ability to contribute economically to the university. The choice of board membership by administrator might seem to indicate conscious decision making; however, we conclude this is political evidence of *habitus* toward selection of specific community boards. Wealthier, more prominent boards have political clout in the community and can contribute in significant ways to the university (e.g., money, internships, and co-ops). Thus, senior level leaders may automatically choose these board memberships to gain more resources for the university which can in turn be used for further engagement with the community.

Dr. Evans mentions a different type of political struggle that goes on between universities when he/she discusses the battle for institutional rankings. “There is some tension between the current (administration) push to get us in the AAU [American Association of Universities] which some people think we are pushing aside some of our community engagement.” Dr. Evans indicates that the AAU may not value a research university with a community engagement agenda as much as a research university that may be working toward a cure for cancer. So, if the leadership of the university decides they want to be a member of the AAU, they may push aside the community engagement agenda for a more AAU worthy research agenda. Dr. Evans suggested that regardless of the direction that the university decides to go with community
engagement, it would still occur. This is evidenced by his/her quote: “It’s like trying to keep down an insurrection. If your faculty are committed, it’s [community engagement] probably going to occur.” Dr. Evans also had very strong statements that led us to believe in his/her *habitus* toward community engagement. He/she had an agreement with a former president who was not committed to community engagement that as long as he/she (Dr. Evans) did not cause any problems, the president would allow Dr. Evan’s community engagement projects and initiatives to continue. The fact that Dr. Evans had a conversation with the president in which he/she essentially asked for approval to continue engaging with the community leads us to the conclusion that there was a deeply rooted commitment that could not be shut down, “like trying to keep down an insurrection” using Dr. Evans own words. These are only a few of the examples that represent how politics influence the *habitus* of university administrators.

**Economics.** In addition to historical and political forces, economics also influence the *habitus* of leaders. Bourdieu discusses capital in its many forms, but ultimately, he looks into how other forms of capital can be turned into economic capital.

Capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations (‘connections’), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility (Bourdieu, as cited in Richardson, 1986, p. 242).

The cultural capital that can be turned into economic capital could include the qualifications that might earn the university a spot in the AAU. A strong academic reputation and membership in
the AAU might interest grant-funding agencies, donors, and students who pay tuition dollars which all increase the economic capital to the university. The social capital that can be turned into economic capital are the board memberships that Dr. Daniel spoke about in the politics section of this paper. Wealthy corporations (of which university leaders are members of the board) could contribute economic capital directly to the university.

Economics and politics are deeply connected, but to focus specifically on economics, the influences are represented in the data by workforce and economic development issues, resource benefits, corporate partnerships, budgetary concerns, and community needs. Dr. Carson mentions a struggle for economic capital and how that struggle affects university-community engagement.

Our challenge, I think, is sometimes with the community who sees us more as a pile of money, and so what they want from us are resources and you know in actuality, we do not have a lot of resources; we have talent and a strong labor pool, but we don’t have money that we can use to fund things.

As we mentioned before, we think Dr. Carson is committed to community engagement, but this statement leads us to consider that other university administrators might not demonstrate *habitus* toward community engagement if they believe this idea about how the community sees the university. Thus, the university administrator that wants to hold on to economic capital might be reluctant to engage with a community that is seeking out that economic capital.

Dr. Daniels discussion takes a different turn on the influence of economic capital on *habitus*. He/she stresses the importance of providing economic capital in the form of funding of community engagement initiatives. “[Administration] should also fund these kinds [community engagement initiatives] of interactions because without programming – you need busses, you
need infrastructure – to organize students so that their strengths and also faculty involvement are channeled into the right kinds of activities.” Not only does Dr. Daniels support funding these initiatives and providing infrastructure for these initiatives to occur, but he/she makes a judgment at the end of his/her statement that community engagement is “the right kinds of activities.” Additionally, Dr. Daniels finds community engagement personally rewarding; he/she relayed almost a spiritual connection. “So participating in those sorts of activities, I find them personally rewarding and I feel called to be involved in that kind of activity.” When people find an activity to be personally rewarding, they tend to have instinct to want to do that activity again. Also, when people feel called to be involved in an activity, they feel compelled to do it. Dr. Daniels habitus toward community engagement is impacted by economics in that he/she finds it important to fund those initiatives, but he/she also judges community engagement positively, enjoys those activities and feels called to be involved with the community. Dr. Daniels exhibits habitus toward engagement.

Dr. Brown mentions pressure from the state and federal governments to be sure to develop a workforce and provide jobs for people who will contribute to generating economic capital. “If you look at state and federal levels, some of the pressures that are coming down on us about how we contribute to economic development issues and workforce development and it’s all about jobs created these days.” Dr. Brown asserts that a major way the university engages with the community is by providing jobs, providing internships, and co-ops for students to become productive, knowledgeable workers who will contribute to economic development. Dr. Brown really focused his/her statements on workforce development and job creation. His/her effort in focusing on this aspect of economic capital did not seem to exhibit habitus, his/her efforts were more intentional, calculated, and required thoughtful decision-making versus an
automatic almost unconscious response. Moreover, he/she did not mention in the interview a strong historical influence that would have developed *habitus* toward community engagement like the others in this study.

**Symbolic Context.*** In addition to history, politics, and economics, symbolic context makes up the field of power which works simultaneously to impact *habitus* toward community engagement. Symbolic context can be defined very broadly with descriptions like Midwestern, urban serving, research focused. Furthermore, symbolic context can be described very narrowly within a meeting of a handful of colleagues where a decision must be made in order to proceed on an initiative. Leaders must learn how to understand the context in which they lead. “This involves leaders using and interpreting multiple sources of information, evaluating alternative points of view, and developing a reasoned and defensible argument for practice” (Eacott, 2011, p. 137). The symbolic context in this study is represented by the urban environment, the mission of the university, core strategic planning documents, presidential goals, and social networks.

When speaking about the urban context, Dr. Anderson said: “Some within our community even identify with urban serving universities and it’s that serving language that defines operationally some of the things that we should be doing with our community. We are in service with it and too it.” Dr. Anderson indicates that because the university is located in the urban context, community engagement is automatic and expected. In addition to the university location in an urban environment, Dr. Anderson argues that the mission statement of the university as well as other core documents define university-community engagement. “Core documents define what this institution is all about” and “enriching our community, language right out of our mission statement, major employer, right out of the mission statement, healthcare, indigent care, right out of the mission statement of the university.” This evidence
shows that urban context, core documents, and the mission statement of the university all contribute to the *habitus* of Dr. Anderson toward community engagement.

We noted before that Dr. Carson wanted to bring a land-grant mission to the urban environment; however, he/she does not necessarily think his/her community engagement agenda will be automatically embraced, rather “The president to me sets the direction and the tone, so they make the fundamental commitments about what our role should be in the community.” We reason that like Dr. Evans, Dr. Carson’s *habitus* toward community engagement will not be halted if a president has an agenda that goes in another direction. Both Dr. Anderson and Dr. Carson provide good examples of how symbolic context shape their *habitus* toward community engagement.

The four societal forces (history, politics, economics, and symbolic context) within the field of power discussed above contribute to the *habitus* as well as the role that these university administrators play in the community engagement agenda. Figure D below demonstrates how those forces contribute to the *habitus* of senior leaders, which then affects the ways in which administrators engage with the community. The blue spheres represent the influence (e.g. extensive prior experience) within the field of power (e.g. historical force). The arrows pointing in to the center sphere represent the influence of that particular force on the green sphere, which represents the *habitus* of the senior leader. The arrows going outward represent the actions, behaviors, and decisions of the senior leader toward community engagement. The red spheres then represent the actual ways in which university leaders engage with the community.
The excerpts presented in each of the sections above not only represent how the field of power impacts the *habitus* of university leaders, but the participants’ statements are also very telling of their *habitus* toward community engagement. The data lead us to conclude that there is free will and structure that shape practices that orient these leaders toward being engaged in the community. What we found interesting, however, is that Dr. Brown did not seem to have any statements that led us to see the free will of *habitus* toward engagement. Dr. Brown’s actions toward engagement seemed more calculated and intentional; however, it is difficult to determine free will. Eacott (2010) contends that Bourdieu’s conceptualization of *habitus* “allows for actions to be ‘guided by constraints, as well as for improvisation, different levels of skill, and
different choices to be made in particular situations’” (p. 268). Decisions are constrained by multiple influences and we would argue that the field of power discussed above provides multiple constraints for leaders. So, it is difficult for some to have the free will demonstrated by *habitus*. Decisions must be made deliberately and in a calculated manner even if an individual has been submersed in community engagement practice for an entire career. Dr. Brown simply feels like he/she needs to carefully think through decisions of community engagement before actions and decisions are made. Another interesting piece is that Dr. Brown did not seem to have a strong historical background of engagement and thus, he/she might not have developed a strong *habitus* toward community engagement. All of the senior leaders made decisions that were calculated and conscious while other actions and decisions, particularly from the participants other than Dr. Brown, seemed more of free will, displaying *habitus* toward community engagement.

When these leaders make decisions, most automatically consider how the decisions impact the university community as well as the larger community. Often times, they look for relationships and ways for the university and community to come together for mutual benefit. There is compounding evidence that their roles’ as senior leaders are inextricably linked to engaging with the community. They may not be in the trenches working with the community; however, they provide the environment, connections, support, and resources so that others can carry out the university-community engagement efforts. They recognize principles of social justice as legitimate and valuable, but the application of these principles vary from leader to leader. Furthermore, societal forces of history, politics, economics, and symbolic context, influence the ways in which university leaders make decisions about community engagement.
Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

This study adds to the field of knowledge about higher education leadership and the roles, intentions, and actions of senior level administrators in university-community engagement. This research promotes a unique understanding of how the field of power, in the form of historical, political, economic, and symbolic context, impacts the practices of university senior leaders. It further explores the level of commitment to social justice that the leaders exhibit in their agendas and practices for community engagement. The practice we discussed happens to be community engagement; however, the same understanding could be applied to practice toward policy creation and implementation throughout many facets of the university (e.g. diversity initiatives, enrollment management, and faculty tenure and promotion decisions).

This research also indicates that there is not one model or method for how senior leaders should engage in the community or how they should go about the practices of their leadership position. Each of the leaders in this study was effected by: a) their own history (at other institutions as well as their current one), b) the politics of the university (which differs because none of them are in the same leadership role), c) the economics of the university and the greater community, and d) the symbolic context of the university, including the moments when decisions are made and actions are taken. Some of these influences in the field of power are shared; however, some of the influences are specific to the experiences of the individual senior leader. The specificity of experiences exemplifies why there is no model or method for senior level university leadership.

This research can impact the professional development and succession planning of future senior level leaders. Current university leaders need to look at what experiences they are providing to future leaders to enhance their development. The findings of this study indicate an
importance of leaders to be reflective and introspective about their practices and to share their lived experiences and processes of decision making with those who report to them, or who they may be grooming to be the future senior leaders. Rather than focusing on the outcome of decisions that leaders make, the field of leadership development would be wise to focus on the influences from the field (history, politics, economics, and symbolic context) that brought the leader to that decision. Leadership development and succession planning could focus on the process of decision making rather than outcomes of decisions that are made or qualities and styles of leadership.

As demonstrated, we have learned a great deal about how societal forces influence the *habitus* of senior level leaders; however a limitation of this study is that we only conducted the research with five senior level leaders. A stronger investigation might include interviews with or surveys of all of the senior level leaders at this particular university. Moreover, the study could be strengthened if we conducted a comparative analysis of senior level leaders and engagement at other types of institutions. We could investigate community colleges, teaching focused universities, historically black colleges and universities, land-grant institutions, and rural colleges or universities. Having larger, random samples could enhance the validity of this research.

We think it is also important to investigate senior level leadership and community engagement using multiple theoretical lenses. Organizational theory may be well suited to further understand how organizational structures impact university-community engagement efforts. Different theoretical frameworks might provide additional information about why and how universities and their leaders engage with their local communities. Further inquiry could be done to explore specific university-community engagement initiatives, policy development, etc.
in order to consider the impact, strengths, weaknesses, and outcomes of those initiatives and policies. Rather than looking more broadly at initiatives across a university, one could look more specifically at a School of Education or an Educational Leadership program to see if and how these entities are engaging in the community and to what extent such engagement practices exhibit a commitment to the principles of social justice. Universities can impact social change in urban communities. We argue that further knowledge is needed to understand social justice commitments of universities as well as a deeper understanding of how societal forces impact the practices of university constituents.
References


