Defining University Anchor Institution Strategies: Comparing Theory to Practice

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Defining University Anchor Institution Strategies: Comparing Theory to Practice

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ABSTRACT
Since the 1990s, some urban universities have served as neighborhood anchors with an interest in revitalization. Current theory suggests anchors adopt ‘shared value’ approaches, leveraging resources for mutually beneficial improvement in the community. This study explores assumptions in contemporary anchor frameworks and uses a survey to examine how 22 U.S. universities approach their roles as anchor institutions. The study finds that the universities tend to prioritize place-based initiatives, while contemporary frameworks are more normative and highlight socioeconomic practices. Based on reported strategies, the author proposes an alternate typology that accounts for the ways universities most commonly describe anchor approaches, complementing contemporary theory.

Introduction
In cities around the world, universities have held various roles: They are centers of knowledge and hubs of innovation, experimentation, and critical discussion. They are major employers and landholders, contributing to the physical character of a neighborhood and economic fingerprint of a city. In the twenty-first century, however, some universities are pursuing another role as an anchor institution with a vested interest in neighborhoods. Scholars have studied this phenomenon for more than a decade, defining and building theory, examining case studies, and identifying best practices. A smaller stream of research is beginning to consider evidence-based outcomes of anchor revitalization strategies, as well as potential challenges and opportunities for neighborhoods (Ehlenz, 2016, 2017; Silverman, Patterson, Yin, & Wu, 2015). Nevertheless, this relatively young body of research has yet to compare the normative assertions of theory to the positive actions of practice, leaving a knowledge gap.

This study uses contemporary anchor institution frameworks and survey results from 22 U.S. universities, to compare theoretical anchor institution models to university-reported descriptions of anchor revitalization efforts. Specifically, it examines the following research question: What revitalization strategies do university anchors employ and how do these approaches compare to anchor institution models? First, the study reviews historic precedents for anchor institutions and examines contemporary anchor frameworks, identifying the assumptions and best practices embedded in anchor institution theory.
Subsequently, it analyzes university anchor survey responses to identify trends in their revitalization activities and to highlight differences between theory and practice.

The survey offers insights into the types of institutions choosing to invest in neighborhood revitalization, the strategies administrators choose to employ, and the prevalence (or absence) of anchor institution best practices. The results complicate the notion of an anchor institution model, revealing key differences from the contemporary frameworks in the field. Whereas contemporary frameworks are deductive, identifying practices that enable an anchor to leverage its resources and stimulate mutually beneficial revitalization outcomes for itself and the community, survey responses reveal an imbalance in the ways universities approach revitalization, with less emphasis on neighborhood-focused strategies. Informed by these results, the article proposes a new anchor typology that accounts for the ways institutions are defining their revitalization approaches in practice. The typology complements the contemporary anchor frameworks, providing a means of assessing the university’s existing revitalization strategies and identifying key gaps.

The article begins with a literature review that examines the definition and roles of anchor institutions, before focusing on U.S. university anchors as a specific category. The review traces precedents for the university anchor institution, beginning in the late nineteenth century through present-day models, and concludes with the analysis of two contemporary theoretical frameworks for assessing anchor institution revitalization. The data and methods section describes the survey sampling frame, instrument, and respondents. Subsequently, the findings section examines the survey results and introduces an alternate anchor institution typology. Finally, the conclusion section discusses the study’s implications and considers future research opportunities.

Universities in Place: Examining the Evolution of the University as an Anchor Institution

The anchor institution concept grows out of the absence of services and major stakeholders in urban communities. In their literature review, Taylor and Luter identify the 1960s as the impetus for the model (Taylor & Luter, 2013). After corporations and industries abandoned their urban locales in the mid-twentieth century and tax bases (as well as public service provisions) declined, the remaining ‘anchored’ institutions were in a position to address the void (Maurrasse, 2001; Taylor & Luter, 2013).

The Aspen Institute first coined the term anchor institution in a 2001 study, defining it as an urban institution with “significant infrastructure in a specific community [that is] therefore unlikely to move” (Fulbright-Anderson, Auspos, & Anderson, 2001). Anchor institutions are comprised of “sticky capital,” with fixed investments in place (e.g. real estate, facilities, and infrastructure), and represent major employers and economic assets (Maurrasse, 2001). The literature has principally identified universities and academic medical centers and hospitals as anchors (“eds and meds”) (Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Taylor & Luter, 2013). The think-tank, The Democracy Collaborative classifies other nonprofits as potential anchors, including cultural institutions, sports teams, churches, or libraries (http://community-wealth.org/strategies/panel/anchors/index.html); however, limited comparative research explores variation in the anchor model. This study focuses specifically on the university anchor.

The anchor institution field includes a well-developed discussion of the economic contributions of universities. In the U.S., more than half of all universities are located in urban centers (Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, 2010). They generate massive amounts of economic activity through various mechanisms, including academic research, service provision, and the attraction of a large student body (C. Adams, 2003; Goddard & Vallance, 2013; Perry & Wiewel, 2005). In a 2002 report, the Initiative
for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC) and CEOs for Cities noted urban universities spent $136 billion on salaries, goods, and services in 1996 (Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, & CEOs for Cities, 2002). These institutions owned more than $100 billion in fixed assets and employed two million workers, two-thirds of whom were in non-faculty administrative and support positions. Birch notes “eds and meds” in the five major cities of the U.S. Northeast Corridor collectively employed nearly a million people, claimed nearly $100 billion in aggregated operating budgets, and attracted $28 billion in sponsored programs, gifts, and contracts in 2010 (Birch, 2013).

International studies point to the regional economic impacts of universities, emphasizing their ability to spur growth through innovation and knowledge transfers (e.g. Charles, 2006, 2011; Chatterton & Goddard, 2000). Recent UK-based assessments describe university anchors as occupying a regional economic development role, with limited prioritization of social or community-level revitalization efforts (Goddard, Coombes, Kempton, & Vallance, 2014; Lebeau & Cochrane, 2015). This arrangement is strongly influenced by the hierarchy of national research and regional universities, as well as funding priorities. Policy changes in the funding mechanisms for higher education have shifted towards a marketization model of recruitment, which may limit appetites for community partnership and engagement. Perhaps for these reasons, the anchor institution literature tends to be more U.S.-centric.

Although institutional immobility and regional economic ties characterize anchor institutions, they do not account for the motivations driving universities to invest in their neighborhoods. Some U.S.-based literature points to a “social purpose credo,” which introduces community-focused values into institutional missions (Taylor & Luter, 2013). There is a belief that anchors are “inherently an important potential institutional base for helping community based-economic development in general, and civically engaged development in particular” (Alperovitz, Dubb, & Howard, 2008, p. 71). Scholars point to founding higher education principles, including John Dewey’s nineteenth century call for universities to embrace civic engagement (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007). More recently, these principles include a commitment to community embeddedness through service learning and applied research models (e.g. Dewar & Isaac, 1998; Reardon, 2006). Others regard “enlightened self-interest” as the primary motivator for urban institutions to engage in community revitalization (Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Sungu-Eryilmaz, 2009). Dependent upon their ability to maintain institutional assets and attract faculty, staff, and students, universities possess a natural stake in the stability of their neighborhood. Thus, university investments in neighborhoods become as beneficial to the institution as they are to the community. Beyond the institution itself, many local governments and communities in the U.S. hold an expectation that universities will support their communities as an extension of their nonprofit status (C. T. Adams, 2014; Hodges & Dubb, 2012).

The notion of a democratic ‘mandate’ in the U.S. literature differs from the European conceptualization. As a British think tank summarizes, the UK does not have a broadly accepted definition for anchor institutions, nor do they hold the same expectations of cultural, social, and economic supports for communities (The Work Foundation, 2010). And, while UK (and European) institutions are no less ‘sticky’ than their U.S. counterparts, there are nontrivial differences in the state’s roles in communities, as well as anchor institution governance structures and mandates. These differences may account for the more regional focus of European university anchor, as opposed to the neighborhood emphasis held by many U.S. anchors. Further, they underscore the more developed U.S. anchor institution research versus the more nascent state of international literature.
Five Eras of the U.S. University as an Anchor Institution

Since the 1990s, the anchor institution literature has proliferated. Universities are among the most studied type of anchor, with U.S. institutions prominent in the case studies and best practices. This review begins with the precedents for university engagement in neighborhoods and concludes with an analysis of two predominant frameworks that guide best practice for anchor revitalization strategies. It describes how university anchors have evolved over five eras, with each representing the socio-political relations and resources at the time. The review builds a basis for assessing the survey responses and developing a new typology.

The First Era: The Morrill Act and a Social Contract

The first era is rooted in the designation of land grant institutions in the late nineteenth century. The Morrill Act of 1862 (Act) represents the first federal intervention in U.S. higher education (Mumper, Gladieux, King, & Corrigan, 2011). The Act allocated land for the creation of land-grant colleges as part of westward expansion efforts; states either used the land for a college or sold it and established an endowment with the proceeds. The Act facilitated curriculum changes intended to extend higher education beyond traditional liberal arts and theology to practical education in industry and agriculture. While it did not necessarily achieve its initial purpose of bolstering local industry, the Act did foster an enduring connection between a university and the regional economy.

The Second Era: University and the Urban Laboratory

The second era of university anchors developed in the early twentieth century. As cities experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization, an influx of immigrants and working poor sparked a different model of university engagement. Some universities embraced the ‘urban laboratory’, engaging with local neighborhoods to address physical and social ills. The settlement house movement offers a prime example (Bromley, 2006; O’Mara, 2012). Originating in London, the movement brought university faculty and students out of their ivory towers and into urban communities, where they experienced slum living, conducted participatory action research, and provided basic education, public health, and other social services. However, as the twentieth century marched forward, the priorities of urban anchors changed and community partnerships around social issues declined.

The Third Era: Universities as a Tool for Urban Renewal

The third era emerged in the wake of World War II, as university anchors pursued direct intervention in neighborhoods to eliminate blight and expand the campus footprint. These activities fell under the umbrella of Urban Renewal and responded to federally-funded demands for research and growing enrollments via the GI Bill (O’Mara, 2005; Teaford, 2000). Procedurally, universities and cities alike viewed Urban Renewal as an opportunity to remove physical, social, and economic deterioration from the neighborhoods. Broad demolition and population displacement preceded the development of new university-affiliated facilities. O’Mara argues the physical needs and development tools that epitomized Urban Renewal, shaped university-community relationships in subsequent periods (2012). Further, the era’s Modernist design influences informed the university’s relationship with its community, creating inward-looking campuses and reinforcing the impression of universities as isolated academic enclaves. Predictably, discord and mistrust characterized university-community interactions during this period, as it revealed clear divisions between university and community interests.
The Fourth Era: University-Community Partnerships

In the wake of the contentious Urban Renewal era, urban institutions largely disengaged from physical planning within their neighborhoods and returned to their scholarly enclaves (Perry, Wiewel, & Menendez, 2009). The fourth period largely emphasized outreach (and avoided physical intervention), including civic engagement, academic-based community research, and service learning as a means of intellectual neighborhood engagement and service delivery (Hodges & Dubb, 2012). A substantial share of current anchor institution literature engages with this era, including numerous self-studies of university-community partnerships and comparative cases (e.g. Anyon, Gardner, & Fernandez, 2007; Cooper, Kotval-K, Kotval, & Mullin, 2014; Curwood, Munger, Mitchell, Mackeigan, & Farrar, 2011).

Two events in the mid-1990s solidified the role of civic engagement and university-community partnership in the literature. The first was the designation of the Office of University Partnerships (OUP) and federal grants for Community Outreach Partnerships Centers (COPC) by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Feld, 1998), which recognized university anchors as untapped resources in struggling urban centers. Between 1994 and 2005, the COPC program allocated nearly $77 million to 188 universities for research and outreach activities that would address neighborhood revitalization (http://www.huduser.org/portal/oup/about.html). The centers created opportunities for universities to collaborate with their neighborhoods, identifying community needs and engaging in problem-solving. Some COPC efforts were more successful than others with several articles pointing to challenges, such as overcoming institutional bureaucracy and offering meaningful resources to address community challenges (Dewar & Isaac, 1998; Lambert-Pennington, Reardon, & Robinson, 2011; LeGates & Robinson, 1998). Others point to the successful use of (and opportunities for) university-community partnerships to stimulate citizen empowerment and transformative change (Lowe, 2008; Reardon, 1998, 2006).

The second event was the convening of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities in 1996 (Alperovitz et al., 2008). The Commission included leaders from 25 public universities, who called for institutional reform across five topics, including: the student experience, student access, campus culture, the role of the institution in a “learning society,” and the engaged institution (Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities, n.d.). The Commission produced a report for each topic, as well as a concluding document that proposed a renewed social contract between university and society. The Commission defined institutional engagement as actions that extend beyond “a one-way process in which the university transfers its expertise to key constituents … By engagement the Commission envisions partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table” (2001, p. 21). This declaration of civic engagement and the embeddedness of a university within its community, together with the federal creation of COPC, solidified the “professional/expertise model” of partnership (Nye & Schramm, 1999).

The Fifth Era: University Anchors and Neighborhood Revitalization

While the university-community partnership model persists, it has been joined by a fifth era of university anchors. During the same period when HUD was initiating COPC and more formal university-community partnerships, a subset of universities saw the need for more explicit action. This is the basis for the university anchor as city developer and planner (Bunnell & Lawson, 2006), distinguished from the fourth era by its direct engagement in neighborhood revitalization beyond community partnership. These efforts were largely motivated by the deterioration in university neighborhoods during the 1980s and 1990s, including rising crime and property disinvestment (Alperovitz et al., 2008; Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Rodin, 2007). A decrease in federal research funding coincided with this era, shifting
the focus of many institutions from national to local. Given the lingering consequences of Urban Renewal, several universities recognized an opportunity (and necessity) to intervene in place but in a less hegemonic way. The current anchor institution model, including investments in neighborhood revitalization, emerged out of this paradigm shift.

Present-day scholarship is primarily grounded in the fourth and fifth eras of university anchors. Although the two models are not mutually exclusive and often coexist in a university’s approach to place, the literature rarely makes connections between them. The remainder of this paper explores the fifth era of university anchors, which incorporates university-community partnership activities but expands the scope of work to include physical, economic, and social revitalization strategies.

**Contemporary Frameworks: The Roles and Assumptions for Anchor Institutions in the Fifth Era**

Since the 1990s, some have begun conceptualizing frameworks for the contemporary anchor institution model. Scholars, think tanks, and philanthropic organizations often emphasize the anchor institution as an accumulation of wealth, skills, and opportunities in the neighborhood. They speak to the immense opportunity of harnessing these assets and redistributing them, at least in part, into place (Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, 2010; Dubb, McKinley, & Howard, 2013a; Hodges & Dubb, 2012). Embedded in their arguments is an implicit expectation that the university and its neighbors define ‘quality of life’ similarly and the institution’s investment is analogous to a rising tide that raises all (or most) of the neighborhood’s proverbial boats.

In the last decade, two primary anchor institution frameworks have emerged from research institutes. The frameworks share similar attributes, highlighting the breadth of skills, assets and opportunities an anchor institution possesses and identifying ways to leverage those opportunities for neighborhood improvement. This study uses these frameworks to consider the normative question posed by the literature: what are and/or what should anchor institutions be pursuing? Subsequently, the frameworks are compared to survey responses from universities pursuing anchor strategies, probing the validity of their embedded assumptions and proposing a new typology that encapsulates the diversity of anchor approaches in practice.

The first framework is an anchor institution ‘action agenda’ by ICIC, with an initial framework presented in 2002 and refined in 2010 (Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, 2011; Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, & CEOs for Cities, 2002). Aligned with ICIC’s mission to “drive economic prosperity in America’s inner cities through private sector investment to create jobs, income, and wealth for local residents” (http://icic.org), the framework identifies seven key roles for anchor institutions in urban communities and, subsequently, offers strategies for adapting those roles to stimulate community revitalization.

ICIC’s proposed roles can be classified into four groups: core institutional roles; economic roles; physical roles; and public purpose roles (see Table 1). Within its core interests as an institution, the university provides education and services (including research), and serves as an innovation hub (cluster anchor), facilitating and leveraging talent, capital, and business development and growth. As an economic engine, the anchor can access its role as an employer, purchaser of goods and services, and/or resource for workforce development. Given its status as a major landholder with substantial physical assets, the university functions as a real estate developer within its community. And, from a public purpose perspective, the university possesses the talent and expertise to build community capacity and infrastructure (community infrastructure builder).
The Democracy Collaborative contributes another framework for understanding and, ultimately, evaluating the roles of anchor institutions in place. The Anchor Dashboard encompasses an ‘anchor mission’ approach to university-community engagement that distinguishes isolated community-facing programs from a commitment to permanently engage with community as part of the day-to-day business and culture of the organization (Dubb, McKinley, & Howard, 2013b). The progressive framework aims to provide anchors with a means of measuring and interpreting their impact on the community, with a focus on low-income households. It compiles interviews and readily available data resources to propose a ‘dashboard’ with four indicators; each indicator is augmented by specific metrics that offer a more precise definition and begin to quantify the anchor’s place-based impact. The indicators include: economic development, spanning equitable local and minority hiring and procurement, business incubation, affordable housing, and arts and cultural development; community building, including building community capacity and contributing to financially secure households; education of youth (K-12); and health, safety and environment, addressing public safety, healthy neighborhoods, and environmental stewardship. Table 1 documents these roles relative to the ICIC framework.

As a practitioner resource, the Democracy Collaborative framework offers a broader perspective of community impact than the ICIC approach, demonstrated by its focus on public health, environmental, and K-12 education metrics in addition to economic development. Both frameworks are largely focused on the institutional perspective with respect to available data and scope of impacts. Arguably, this ensures that the framework(s) can be more readily utilized by anchors. In addition, the Democracy Collaborative’s emphasis on an anchor mission as an institutional ‘state of mind’ represents progress in the anchor institution discourse.

Together, the frameworks suggest a deductive anchor institution model, offering a schema derived from the philosophical principles that often guide the discourse (see Benson et al., 2007; Harkavy, 2006; Harkavy & Hodges, 2012). They provide a normative roadmap towards a ‘shared value’ model of engagement, identifying a range of tools an anchor could employ to leverage its resources for broader community revitalization, while also satisfying its institutional needs. These deductive toolboxes are useful and play a significant role in pushing the anchor institution model forward. However, they are...
also laden with assumptions about how contemporary anchors are approaching their neighborhoods. The purpose of this study is to explore whether these assumptions hold in practice.

Data & Methodology

This study uses a survey to examine the scale and scope of university investments in neighborhood revitalization and considers the relationship between anchor institution theory and practice. The survey collected information from universities pursuing anchor institution strategies since the 1990s (refer to Ehlenz, 2015). It targeted university administrators and sought details about the investments the institution has made in campus expansion activities since 1990 and anchor institution strategies over the same period. Last, the survey asked respondents to describe the timing and motivations for their neighborhood efforts, implementation details including relevant partnerships and funding sources, and any evaluative initiatives the university had undertaken.

Defining University Investment in Neighborhood Revitalization

The survey defined neighborhood revitalization activities as university initiatives targeting off-campus quality of life issues, including physical conditions (e.g. property conditions, public infrastructure, and amenities), socio-economic conditions (e.g. poverty and unemployment), services (e.g. commercial and retail, neighborhood schools), and/or public safety conditions. Collectively, these efforts align with the fifth anchor institution era, addressing both neighborhood conditions (a public interest) and institutional needs (a private interest).

The additional criteria that distinguish university activities in neighborhood revitalization, include: investments that extend beyond the existing campus boundary and encompass more than university-specific needs or facilities; investments in physical improvements that target privately-owned properties; and/or university investments that address non-physical neighborhood dimensions, such as (but not limited to) community capacity building, service learning, or technical expertise (e.g. expertise to support primary or secondary education, workforce development, homeownership counseling). The survey viewed university efforts in neighborhood revitalization as distinct from investments in campus expansion. It distilled seven categories of anchor revitalization activities from the literature (see Table 2) and asked respondents to report action in all relevant areas.

University Sampling Frame

The survey used a sampling frame based on three primary criteria. First, it used the Institutional Post-Secondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) to identify a population of eligible universities. This criterion narrowed the field to those institutions that are predisposed to engage in a range of revitalization activities, due to their neighborhood context (e.g. urbanity, density, socio-economic conditions) and institutional capacity. While there is value in examining variation in anchor roles by university type, this study held the category of institution constant to consider variation in strategies across context and motivation. Utilizing the 2012–2013 reporting year, the sampling frame identified 1030 institutions (from 7735 institutions in the IPEDS database) that were: accredited and not-for-profit, four-year degree programs, degree-granting, and located in an urbanized place, defined as a city or suburb with a population greater than 100,000.
Second, the sampling frame used anchor institution literature to identify university participation, in some capacity, in neighborhood engagement and revitalization. Given the nascent state of the field, this criterion aimed to constrict the sample to those institutions already familiar with the anchor institution concept. The author used articles, books, reports, and conference presentations or proceedings to identify sixty-five universities that invested in some form of university anchor revitalization. Subsequently, the author validated the sample across three known anchor institution resources: the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement; the membership list and surveys from the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities; and the Anchor Institution Task Force.

Third, the survey asked respondents to affirmatively identify their institution’s participation in neighborhood revitalization strategies (per the survey definition, above) between 1990 and the present. This final criterion served as an extension to the previous one: To provide an accurate account of their activities, survey respondents had to possess an understanding of the trends in university revitalization, including the types of activities described in the survey. In addition, the participant needed to have an awareness of their institution’s investments (ongoing and in the recent past), as they pertained to neighborhood revitalization. An initial email offered revitalization and expansion activity definitions to participating universities; respondents were asked to verify their involvement in one or both efforts before proceeding with the study.

**Survey Respondents: A Description**

Between August and October 2014, 22 universities responded to the survey (34%), including 12 public and ten private institutions in 19 U.S. cities and 15 states. On most counts, the respondents were typical of the 65 universities invited to participate in the survey. Geographically, engaged universities existed in every region of the country, though survey respondents were modestly over-represented in the Midwest and under-represented in the South and West relative to the sample. Respondents were comparably dispersed among large cities (more than 250,000 people), mid-sized cities (100,000 to 250,000 people), and large suburbs (more than 250,000 people).

**Table 2. Seven categories of university neighborhood revitalization activities.**

1. **Housing revitalization strategies**
   - Property development
   - Property management
   - Homeownership incentive programs
   - Rehabilitation incentive programs
   - Off-campus student housing restrictions and/or management programs

2. **Commercial revitalization strategies**
   - Property development
   - Property management
   - Property tenant

3. **Economic revitalization strategies**
   - Local procurement of goods and/or services
   - Local, minority, and/or women-owned contracting
   - Local hiring preference
   - Workforce training programs

4. **Public amenities**
   (including streetscaping, open spaces, beautification)

5. **Neighborhood public safety programs**

6. **Neighborhood K-12 initiatives**
   (including laboratory school, partnership school, financial or programming support)

7. **Other community service programs**
   (including student volunteerism or academically based community service)
From an institutional perspective, public and private universities participated in revitalization activities in similar ways with a roughly equal distribution among both the survey respondents and the eligible 65 universities. The Carnegie classification distribution of respondents and the sample were similar, although they differed from the institutional population. The Basic Carnegie Classifications broke down as follows (Table 4): approximately 45% of the respondent and sample universities were classified as very high activity research institutions; 36 and 26%, respectively, were high activity research institutions; and the remainder were doctoral (9 and 8%) or non-research institutions (8 and 18%). Relative to all four-year classified institutions in the Carnegie Foundation database ($n = 1669$), the eligible universities in this study are strongly skewed towards research-focused universities with substantially fewer institutions in the category ‘other non-research’, which includes Master’s Colleges and Universities and Baccalaureate Colleges. Similar to the Enrollment classification shows that survey
respondents and sample institutions largely encompassed programs with strong undergraduate and graduate mixes (though not exclusively one or the other); the population is more strongly skewed towards higher undergraduate enrollments.

**Findings: Survey results**

University respondents identified three timeframes for their initial involvement in neighborhood revitalization. The first and second generations of institutions began pursuing revitalization during the 1990s or early-to-mid 2000s, respectively. The third saw themselves as legacy institutions, choosing to cast their place-based commitments to the inception of the university and/or its existing campus.

Respondents offered several insights with respect to the diversity and breadth of university revitalization strategies. First, they confirmed that institutions continue to pursue fourth-generation university-community partnerships. More than three-quarters of respondents included student-centric activities in their neighborhood anchor strategies, including community service \( (n = 19) \) and on-/off-campus public safety initiatives \( (n = 17) \), and several engaged with K-12 education in some capacity \( (n = 15) \). Based on historic precedent, these activities can be classified as the ‘traditional’ approach to university engagement, echoing the core institutional roles in the ICIC and Democracy Collaborative frameworks. They create opportunities for volunteerism and applied learning, connecting academics with the community and fulfilling the institution’s student-driven mission. They also address core institutional concerns for student wellbeing, extending campus safety measures into neighborhoods via neighborhood policing that augments municipal services, public safety officers along key routes, and/or fixed or flexible university transportation networks that connect the neighborhood and campus.

**Economic Revitalization Strategies**

Most universities reported economic revitalization investments that went beyond conventional knowledge-sharing roles. This anchor activity category corresponds with the general thrust of the ICIC and Democracy Collaborative frameworks, emphasizing connections between the institution’s resource needs (e.g. consumer goods, employees) and the local economy. Yet, survey results imply a disconnect between best practice and reported strategies. While 12 respondents described local economic development strategies, their responses were the least consistent in terms of types of activities and definitions relative to the anchor institution literature. Five of the universities claimed comprehensive economic development programs with involvement in at least three of the four sub-activities (see Table 2 for main and sub-activities). Only two institutions (both private) described strategies that deliberately sought to concentrate institutional resources (e.g. procurement, hiring, contracting) in a specific neighborhood.

Economic revitalization responses suggest three things. First, although several universities report economic development activities, their geographic focus was distinct from other physical revitalization activities, extending into the entire city or region. This aligns with the characterization of universities as regional economic anchors, but diverges from U.S. anchor frameworks. Second, many economic strategies were rooted in existing policies, not attributed to a deliberate anchor institution strategy. For example, public universities were already pursuing some type of local procurement or contracting as an extension of state mandates; some private universities were required to comply with local hiring or procurement as a condition of city-approved institutional master plans or community benefits agreements. Here, too, ‘local’ was a relative term and often referred to much broader regions. Third, the
economic investments were not always concrete. While some strategies provided job creation, skills training, procurement investments, or entrepreneurship, other programs sought to build awareness more generally with newsletters or programs to build regional job sectors. While these reported activities signal efforts to strengthen local economies, they often deviate from the best practices identified in the contemporary anchor frameworks, suggesting anchors have not reached their full potential in this arena.

### Housing and Commercial Revitalization Strategies

For housing and commercial revitalization strategies, market interventions and development projects dominated relative to programs or policies targeting specific populations or socioeconomic conditions. More than half of respondents described investments in off-campus housing and commercial revitalization. New construction projects – often privately developed on university-owned land – were central to many university strategies and were more common than homeownership programs or off-campus student housing initiatives, for example.

Eleven universities reported commercial development strategies, which are rarely identified in anchor institution literature. They emphasized physical projects, including new construction, property acquisition, and/or property management. These efforts were sometimes university-led and managed; more often, they were completed via a university subsidiary or in partnership with a private developer through a long-term land lease. Commercial initiatives also included instances where the university leased a portion of a new development, lending its institutional reputation to secure the legitimacy and financial feasibility of the project.

More than two-thirds of respondents reported off-campus housing revitalization activities ($n = 14$), reflecting two trends. First, there was significant interest in housing development, including new construction, property acquisition for the purposes of upgrading existing rental stock and/or maintaining downward pressure on market rents, and/or property management. Universities, private partners (often via a long-term land lease), or university subsidiaries with targeted housing missions implemented these strategies. Most place-based housing strategies reflected investments in physical development ($n = 14$), either alone ($n = 8$) or in tandem with the second type of approach ($n = 6$) – soft strategies. Soft strategies consisted of household-level programs or incentives. When present, they included mortgage and/or rehabilitation incentives for university-affiliated households living in target neighborhoods or, in fewer instances, neighborhood-wide affordable housing initiatives.

### (Re)Defining the University Anchor Institution: A New Typology of Revitalization Strategies

Survey responses suggest that universities may not be fully aligned with contemporary anchor frameworks. They appear to be actively engaged in traditional community engagement and student voluntarism activities, in addition to emphasizing place-based activities in housing, commercial, and economic revitalization. Conversely, ICIC and Democracy Collaborative frameworks do not adequately account for the prevalence of development-focused investments and, as a result, do not capture the full extent of an institution’s place-based impact.

Led by survey responses, the author proposes a two-tiered anchor institution typology for university anchor strategies (Table 5). This alternate conceptualization responds to reported diversity in anchor approaches and calibrates for the presence of place-based strategies. The typology uses a diversification
indicator to address the breadth of anchor initiatives. Low diversification approaches consist of fewer than four key strategies, moderate efforts include four to five strategies, and high initiatives include at least six of seven key strategies. Subsequently, the typology considers the place-based investments. The focus is on bricks-and-mortar housing or commercial projects, reflecting the prevalence of development projects relative to program- or incentive-based revitalization. The place-based indicator identifies if strategies were present, including mixed (engaging housing and commercial investment), housing-focused, or commercial-focused. Supplement 1 offers a detailed accounting of university activities.

Nine universities were highly diversified in their approaches, with each pursuing at least one place-based strategy and the majority \( n = 6 \) reporting investments in both housing and commercial projects. Ten institutions were moderately diversified, with the majority \( n = 6 \) engaging at least one place-based initiative and four investing in mixed strategies. Three universities described low diversification approaches, investing in two of seven revitalization categories. Only one university invested in place-based housing, which was absent from the others.

The utility of an alternate anchor institution typology is twofold. First and foremost, it is derived from the ways universities are currently approaching their work. The typology offers new insights into the anchor institution model, identifying differences between normative theory and reported practice. It offers a framework for assessing the ways institutions interpret their anchor approaches and examining outcomes for different models (e.g. highly diversified versus moderate and low approaches). Second, the inductive typology complements the deductive ICIC and Democracy Collaborative frameworks. A university can use the proposed typology to classify its current efforts and use deductive frameworks to identify gaps and opportunities for modifying its approach.

### Table 5. Typology of university anchor revitalization strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Strategy Diversification</th>
<th>Place-based Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harvard University</td>
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<td>High</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Columbus</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>▲</td>
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<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>▲</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yale University</td>
<td>New Haven</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case Western University</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>▲</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeastern University</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>▼H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke University</td>
<td>Durham</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>▼C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Portland</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Chicago</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>▲</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Chicago</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>▲</td>
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<tr>
<td>The University of Cincinnati</td>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Widener University</td>
<td>Chester</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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<td>Rutgers-Newark</td>
<td>Newark</td>
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<td>Boston</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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<td>St Petersburg</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>▼H</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Nebraska at Omaha</td>
<td>Omaha</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>▼H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Akron</td>
<td>Akron</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>▼H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Legend

- **High**: 6+ categories of revitalization
- **Moderate**: 4–5 categories of revitalization
- **Low**: <4 categories of revitalization

- ▲: Place-based investment in housing AND commercial
- ▼H: Place-based investment in housing alone
- ▼C: Place-based investment in commercial alone
Implications & Conclusion

This study identified two normative frameworks that describe how anchor institution models could function; survey evidence, however, suggests many universities choose to define their anchor roles in urban neighborhoods differently. Whereas contemporary frameworks elevate the importance of ‘shared value’ strategies, including community-building and socioeconomic initiatives, surveyed universities reported multi-faceted strategies with greater emphasis on traditional community outreach and physical revitalization projects. The findings offer a new perspective to the field, clarifying the nature of anchor revitalization approaches in practice relative to the conventional wisdom expressed in theory. The resultant typology offers an alternate way to consider the status quo of anchor institution strategies, providing a framework for stratifying and evaluating different approaches, as well as identifying opportunities to improve existing approaches to better satisfy ‘shared value’ frameworks.

Three shortfalls become apparent when contemporary anchor frameworks are compared to university-reported anchor strategies. First, there are differences in observed economic strategies. Although central to contemporary anchor frameworks, normative best-practices are chiefly absent from most reported universities approaches. There are some successful examples of ‘shared value’ economic strategies, including the Greater University Circle Initiative’s (GUCI) multi-anchor partnership in Cleveland. Its economic inclusion approach includes locally-owned and employed business development for targeted procurement, business retention and attraction to GUCI corridors, and workforce development strategies (Glanville, 2013, p. 58). Yet, few economic anchor strategies reported a local geographic focus or direct resource commitments that correspond to best practice.

Second, there are limited revitalization programs to address socioeconomic concerns in neighborhoods. Few universities reported household-level initiatives that might stimulate wealth-building or stability for low-income communities. While social revitalization is embedded in the ethos of contemporary anchor models, these strategies are not prevalent in U.S. practice. Duke University offers one example, prioritizing neighborhood-wide affordable housing programs; notably Duke’s initiatives were implemented with non-profit community development and City of Durham partners. One implication may be that university anchors and communities should consider the extent to which anchors are the best equipped to address social disinvestment; perhaps, as in the case of Duke, there are better opportunities for institutional anchors to partner with other vested stakeholders.

Third, the survey responses demonstrated substantially more emphasis on physical revitalization than is captured by contemporary frameworks. Respondents described efforts to improve the character of place by investing in vibrant commercial corridors or residential areas, addressing disinvested housing stock and stimulating new consumer demand for the neighborhood. Why might university anchors show a preference for physical revitalization strategies? Universities possess two characteristics that may distinguish their vested interests from other anchors. Universities, like other anchors, are held in place by institutional missions and substantial infrastructure. However, their core student (and parent) constituency is distinct. Whereas hospitals or cultural institutions generally draw from local or regional populations, universities compete for student applications at regional, national, and, increasingly, international scales. Further, recruitment occurs annually, as undergraduate and graduate populations matriculate and graduate. The importance of place-based character and amenities may be elevated in these circumstances, as university anchors seek to sell students not only on their campuses, but also their neighborhoods. In this context, physical revitalization becomes a strategic investment, ensuring the university neighborhood is safe, but also vibrant, for the institutional community. Development strategies also draw upon a core university skill set: expansion and capital improvements. Similar to
hospitals, universities have relevant experience managing complex development projects within their boundaries, which may shape their approach to revitalizing the off-campus neighborhood.

The implications of physical strategies are broad for anchor institution models, and, more importantly, for neighborhoods. Place-based investments do not happen in isolation. Scholars identify innovation, knowledge, and the “creative class” as forces driving urban revitalization (Florida, 2014; Glaeser, 2012). As producers and consumers of creative talent and developers of place, university anchors are key stakeholders in these trends. Universities executed much of their survey-reported development in partnership with private developers – often via long-term land leases – or university subsidiaries. These investments, paired with recent expansions in university enrollment and amenity-rich campuses, catalyze substantial changes in the character of neighborhoods, making them more desirable places for college students, as well as residents seeking urban neighborhoods and developers recognizing new market opportunities. While universities have long concerned themselves with the impact of urban space on their campuses, the recent models of place-based investment demonstrated by this study suggest university anchors are redefining their roles in the urban growth machine (Logan & Molotch, 1987).

Emerging research demonstrates that university neighborhoods with revitalization efforts saw housing costs appreciate at statistically faster rates than elsewhere in their regions (Ehlenz, 2017; 2016). These trends align with concerns about the potential for university anchors to contribute to neighborhood gentrification, calling even greater attention to the finding that institutions emphasize physical revitalization over economic or social strategies. In the absence of strong economic and social revitalization strategies, place-based investments – both anchor-led and private – pose risks of market growth without concurrent economic opportunity. This sparks concern about gentrification in ‘anchored’ neighborhoods. The University of Pennsylvania, for instance, has long faced critiques of “Penztrifying” the neighborhood (e.g. Amborebieta, 2001; Drummond, 2009). Given the intersecting place-based interests of universities and their neighbors, it is incumbent upon university administrators and urban revitalization scholars to evaluate the character and impacts of anchor revitalization strategies so they can adequately serve their communities and constituents.

At present, few anchor institution studies examine the market impacts and demographic changes that follow significant investments in the built environment. Future research could expand anchor institution knowledge in three areas. First, broader empirical assessments of university anchor strategies, including neighborhood market and socioeconomic outcomes, would benefit the field. The proposed typology offers one mechanism for stratifying strategies, enabling a comparison of outcomes across anchor approaches. For instance, do low diversification efforts impact neighborhoods differently than highly diversified approaches? Do ‘shared value’ strategies in contemporary frameworks produce different (or preferred) neighborhood outcomes? Second, this study considers a subset of known university anchor approaches; future research could examine a wider U.S. and international sample, exploring why institutions do, or do not, pursue anchor strategies. Third, as discussed in the literature review, anchor revitalization research is often discrete from university-community partnership and perception literatures (e.g. Gavazzi, 2015; Kim, Brunner, & Fitch-Hauser, 2006), and may benefit from integration with these complementary streams of research. Last, there are opportunities to consider the theoretical implications of university anchors and their interactions with place; one such investigation might explore how university anchor approaches are shaping the contemporary urban growth machine.

Notes

1. The Carnegie Classification of Institution of Higher Education is a standardized framework for stratifying institutions. In 2006, the Carnegie Foundation expanded its database to include an indicator for an “engaged
university” (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2015). Unlike its other classifications, the “engaged university” classification was voluntary. As of 2015, 359 institutions received an “engaged” designation. I cross-referenced eligible universities with the Community Engagement classification, but did not use it as a primary indicator of a neighborhood revitalization activity due to its opt-in requirement and its broad definition of engagement (local, national, and global).

2. The Coalition of Urban Serving (USU) is an organization of public urban research universities with an interest in anchor institutions. USU has conducted two national surveys of its members (Friedman, Perry, & Menendez, 2014; Perry & Menendez, 2010). The results offer valuable information about the types of institutions pursuing anchor strategies, however, there is one principal limitation: USU is a member-only organization and is restricted to public research universities in metropolitan areas with populations of 450,000 or more (http://usucoaliation.org/membership/members). I validated the list of public universities with USU’s published survey results, as well as the list of members; however, due to the exclusion of private universities and public universities in smaller metropolitan areas, I did not use it as a primary resource.

3. The Anchor Institution Task Force (AITF) is an international membership organization, convened in 2008 to advise the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and, subsequently, solidified into a task force with more than 700 institutional and individual members (https://www.margainc.com/aitf/). As part of the university anchor scan, I attended AITF conferences and met with founding AITF members in an effort to generate new leads on universities and validate my existing list.

4. There are 4665 universities included in the Carnegie Classification summary tables, including Associate’s Colleges and Special Focus Two- and Four-Year schools. For the purposes of comparison, I only considered those categories with all four-year institutions (Baccalaureate Colleges, Master’s Colleges & Universities, and Doctoral Universities), equal to 1669 institutions. This number includes universities that would not have met my sampling criteria, including institutions in rural or small city settings.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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References


