

Unraveling Communication Dynamics of University Outreach

by
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Abstract

This qualitative investigation examines the communication dynamics of university outreach from the perspective of higher education administration, addressing the notable gap in how non-traditional scholarship and outreach activities are recognized and communicated within academic settings. Insufficient communication and recognition of diverse scholarly contributions can misalign academic output and impede institutional objectives, creating a discrepancy between institutions' emphasis on societal benefits of outreach and its valuation for faculty tenure and promotion. Rooted in the American Public Land-Grant Universities' call for supportive environments valuing publicly impactful work, this study analyzes the structure and channels used to describe and recognize university outreach, aiming to improve communication and acknowledge non-traditional scholarship.

Guided by the central question, "How does higher education administration describe university outreach?" the research employs a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experience of outreach messaging alongside Actor-Network Theory to analyze the intricate network of human and non-human actors influencing communication structure. Data from document analysis of land-grant institutions' websites and supplemental interviews with executive leadership unraveled how mission, vision, and promotion themes define outreach through service, engagement, policies, and recognition mechanisms, primarily conveyed through institutional websites. Findings emphasize valuable insights for strategic management supporting clearer articulation of university outreach operations, ensuring alignment with the institutional

mission and vision, and strengthening relationships with campus stakeholders and alternative forms of community engagement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Higher education's reputation for promoting the public good is both unique and complex (Farrell & Flowers, 2018; Knobel & Reisberg, 2022; Wendling & Besing, 2018). As a functional area of the academic enterprise, higher education administration is responsible for responding to calls of public accountability and demands for demonstrable valuations beyond traditional teaching and research metrics. This context requires evolving the nature of scholarly work to engage directly with societal needs and contribute visibly to the public good (Foster, 2010; Wanjiru & Xiaoguang, 2021; Wendling & Besing, 2018). University outreach is a fundamental mechanism and direct pathway through which higher education administration provides tangible evidence of higher education's commitment to promoting reciprocity and partnership, facilitating exchanges of knowledge, and pursuing a legacy of common good (Foster, 2010; Hallmark et al., 2023; Wendling & Besing, 2018; Wanjiru & Xiaoguang, 2021).

University outreach is founded on the long-standing purpose of American public land-grant universities and serves as a critical tool for higher education administration to respond to public accountability and show value beyond standard academic measures (Aurbach et al., 2023; Foster, 2010; Hallmark et al., 2023; Lee & Keys, 2013; Wanjiru & Xiaoguang, 2021; Wendling & Besing, 2018). The Morrill Act of 1862 marked the beginning of university outreach by mandating the use of academic resources to address social issues (Morrill Act, 1862, 2022). It has shifted from a major concentration on agriculture to a broader range of economic development and community advancement, cementing its status as a vital functional area. Despite this long-standing, fundamental role, challenges remain in recognizing and communications these critical contributions in academic settings.

A return to public-impact scholarship and active social engagement is being called for by the land-grant universities that were established by the Morrill Act of 1862, which changed their fundamental mandate. People are increasingly discussing how universities should do more than just instruct students and produce graduates; they should also help their communities, and the economy thrive (Gavazi & Gee, 2018). In a system that shapes the experiences of faculty, staff, students, and aligning communities in their pursuit of personal and professional advancement, higher education administration regularly showcases the institution's outreach efforts through a variety of communication channels. Outreach refers to the process of generating, combining, and using information for audiences outside the campus organization (Chang, 2000). Studies suggest higher education institutions lean more towards emphasis on the societal advantages of university outreach over personal promotion for university outreach personnel in their advertising and social media communication (Diel & Katsinas, 2018; Ladognia et al., 2020; Sintani et al., 2021). This is demonstrated by the emphasis on students' social lives, the influence of research beyond campus on institutional advertising, and the use of casual communication and expert information in social media campaigns. It is important to have consistency in the external and internal narratives that tell the story of potential employability for the entire campus community (Divan et al., 2019).

While this communication strategy appeals to external stakeholder engagement, it often creates an internal environment where faculty encounter substantial obstacles in securing recognition within the traditional academic reward system, financial resource equitable allocation, and legitimate credit for their contributions to the institution's mission (Johnson et al., 2019). The gaps in this communication structure publicly celebrate outreach while privately undervaluing the non-traditional scholarship it represents, creating barriers for faculty seeking to

build careers around community-engaged work (Sadler et al., 2018). This discrepancy is especially apparent in the promotion and tenure process, where the language used to describe engagement and outreach scholarship does not always match the system of rewards (Hutchinson, 2011).

This chapter identifies a significant difference in which institutions publicly promote the social advantages of outreach, but its value for faculty tenure and advancement often varies, presenting challenges for faculty pursuing careers in community-engaged work. Chapter 2 supports this by laying out how a lack of broad recognition mechanisms impede the inclusion of public engagement initiatives into university performance evaluations. Although previous research suggest that outreach may lead to career progression, its effects vary by institution and subject, highlighting the complexities of integrating this activity in academic hierarchies. Compounding these challenges is the fact that the decision-making processes and communication dynamics associated with university outreach are little documented. As a result, this study directly addresses this critical gap in literature by looking at how higher education administration describes university outreach, particularly through the analysis of publicly available documents and digital platforms, aiming to unravel the communication structures and channels used and contributing to the creation of more supportive environments that acknowledge and value nontraditional scholarship.

Research problem and need

Effective communication proves essential in determining the perceived value of significant endeavors, requiring extensive recognition, commemoration, and dissemination of accomplishments and contributions through the academic community (Aurbach et al., 2023). The

current higher education administration landscape for university outreach communication presented significant challenges for personnel. Empirically, the decision-making process for university outreach communication lacks extensive documentation, given its unique nature within universities, especially research-intensive institutions. This research addresses the disconnect and extends far beyond individual career concerns to understanding how higher education administration describes and communicates about university outreach, particularly through publicly accessible documents and digital platforms that shape institutional messaging. This study responds directly to the American Public Land-Grant Universities' call for creating "supportive environments for scholars to do publicly impactful work, especially for those categories of scholarship that extend beyond traditional disciplinary bounds" (Aurbach et al., 2023). By exploring how higher education administration describes university outreach, the study aims to present multiple realities of university outreach text expressions that are complex and intertwined.

Statement of purpose

This study contributes to advancing the understanding of university outreach as a functional area of higher education administration by utilizing qualitative methods to analyze the communication structure and channels employed to recognize university outreach activities. The purpose of this research is to simplify higher education administrators' experiences with university outreach communication and evaluate the overall framework of university outreach to analyze the structure of messages and their dissemination through digital infrastructure. This investigation carries substantial importance due to its scrutiny of the promotion of outreach initiatives within the realm of higher education and its investigation of possible inconsistencies between the recognition of outreach and its status as a factor in the tenure and promotion reward

system (Academy, 2023; Anesthesiology, 2023; Doberneck & Fitzgerald, 2008; Tenure System, 2014; Woolston, 2018).

Focus of Inquiry

This dissertation investigates university outreach as a lived experience of personnel who administer higher education, focusing specifically on the coordination of textual expressions as a communication method that readers interpret as representations of activities or information. The research examines how outreach is defined within university settings and explores the diverse forms of communication institutions employ to describe and promote these activities.

Rather than drawing conclusions about the meaning of university outreach or generalizing about best practices for higher education administration, this study aims to develop a comprehensive description of specific higher education practices that support the integration and reframing of textual expressions. Through a phenomenological approach informed by actor-network theory, the research analyzes publicly accessible documents and webpages on university websites, including texts, videos, and photographs that function as calls-to-action for outreach engagement. The investigation compiles a database of messages communicated by higher education administration as representations of practicing university outreach, addressing the notable absence of research on textual expressions of outreach activities in higher education institutions.

Guiding Research Question

The central research question that serves as the foundation for this study is: How does higher education administration describe university outreach? The choice of the interrogative “how” signifies an exploration of the diverse methods utilized in communicating university

outreach, highlighting the complexity and depth inherent in these communication processes that shape social structures. The term “describe” refers to the ways in which the definition and structure of university outreach activities are articulated.

Theoretical frameworks

This study is guided by a dual theoretical framework employing both phenomenology and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). This combined approach offers a robust lens through which to examine the complex dynamics of university outreach communication.

Phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of individuals and how they make meaning or relate to a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following Moustakas’ transcendental approach, drawing insight from van Manen’s systematic steps in data analysis and guidelines for assembling textural and structural description, this study seeks to reduce individual experiences with university outreach communication to a thick, rich description of the universal essence of university outreach messaging and report on commonalities or essences found in shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach is suitable because it allows for an in-depth investigation into the experiences of university outreach personnel, providing valuable insight into the subjective nature of their efforts. It aligns with the study’s aim to understanding the meaning informants hold about how university outreach is communicated by higher education administration, without imposing the researcher’s own meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Higher education administration itself is viewed as a lifeworld specific to university outreach personnel, characterized by multiple complex and intertwined realities, making it a suitable subject for phenomenological inquiry (Schwandt, 2015).

Complementing the phenomenological approach, Actor-Network Theory is a sociological approach and theoretical framework that views everything in the social world, including power dynamics and organizations, as webs of relations within the network they are located (Law, 1992; Law, 2008). ANT plays the leading role in this inquiry by analyzing the hybrid characteristics of communication and its profound effects on higher education. The study employs ANT to respond to the research questions, facilitating a further examination into the structure of messages communicated through web content. ANT is utilized to examine the structure of messaging and how it spreads through the digital infrastructure employed by higher education administration (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010), allowing for an analysis of how the different actors involved in outreach communication both human (personnel, administrators, community partners) and nonhuman (policies, websites, documents, technology), interact and relate to each other (Nickerson & McLeod, 2023; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

ANT helps to explore how and in what forms university outreach personnel, as a function of higher education administration, move, combine, and accumulate messaging regarding university outreach to faculty within the context of community engagement and public service scholarship (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). From an ANT perspective, texts and other entities are emphasized based on their function (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). It emphasizes understanding the connections between ideas and objects, favoring agnosticism, generalized symmetry, and free association (Tummons, 2021). Findings are discussed as networks that perform power dynamics of higher education administration acted out by technological mediums employed by university outreach personnel.

Methodological Overview

To address the central question, the study employs document analysis to examine higher education's communication structures and channels translating information about university outreach. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with university outreach executive leadership serve as a complementary method to identify strategies employed to influence the communication structure and effectiveness of university outreach.

To further probe the central question, the study is guided by the following secondary questions:

- ✓ What are the key channels and methods used by university outreach personnel to communicate outreach for faculty?
- ✓ In what ways does higher education administration use their websites to pass information about the way their faculty represent university outreach?

The decision to employ phenomenology alongside actor-network theory is rooted in their shared focus on understanding human actions and language in relation to specific situations or contexts (Schwandt, 2015). While phenomenology provides an in-depth investigation of the subjective experiences of university outreach personnel, ANT offers a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play by illuminating the complex web of relationships and interactions among informants engaged in administering university outreach. It binds together the understanding of higher education's responsibility to the public good and its communication of outreach boundaries. This dual theoretical approach, structural through ANT and textural through phenomenology, offers a richer, more thorough understanding of the human dimension alongside the structural and relational aspects of university outreach.

The philosophical underpinnings of pragmatism inform the methodological choices, emphasizing finding solutions to real-world problems and appreciating diverse approaches to data collection and analysis within specific contexts. This aligns with the study's goal of addressing the problem of recognizing and rewarding outreach contributions by unraveling how the functional area is framed through communication. The interpretive framework of pragmatism aligns with the research values of appreciating diverse approaches to data collection and analysis and the contexts in which research takes place (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 26 & 33). Pragmatism emphasizes finding solutions to real-world problems, aligning with the goal of bringing awareness to the issue of recognizing and rewarding university outreach personnel for their contributions (Creswell & Poth, p. 33). The most appropriate method for addressing the research questions is phenomenology with an actor-network theory framework.

Scope

The scope of this qualitative investigation focuses on the communication dynamics of university outreach from the perspective of higher education administration. Specifically, it examines university outreach as a lived experience of the personnel who administer higher education, with a particular focus on the coordination of textual expressions as a communication method interpreted by faculty. The study investigates how outreach is defined within university settings and explores the diverse forms of communication institutions utilize to describe and promote these activities. Rather than generalizing best practices, the study aims to develop a comprehensive description of specific higher education practices that support the integration and reframing of textual expressions of university outreach. The research is grounded in the philosophical underpinnings of pragmatism, emphasizing finding solutions to real-world

problems by unraveling how the functional area of university outreach is framed through communication.

Audience: The audience for this study is practitioners and researchers in higher education administration, especially university outreach personnel responsible for faculty engagement or research communications.

Assumptions: First, university outreach personnel at higher education institutions are pivotal in conducting outreach efforts. These individuals, defined as those responsible for administering and coordinating university outreach, are considered knowledgeable insiders and are the chosen informants because they can offer perspectives and information not directly observable by the researcher. Their role involves navigating the communication dynamics of university outreach from the standpoint of higher education administration and they are viewed, from an Actor-Network Theory perspective, as the human actors essential to the social order of university outreach knowledge within the administration. The phenomenological approach aligns with this assumption by seeking to understand the lived experience and meaning these personnel hold regarding how university outreach is communicated.

The second fundamental assumption is that the institution does not provide sufficient recognition and reward for faculty involvement in outreach activities, particularly concerning tenure and promotion. This points to a notable gap in how non-traditional scholarship and outreach contributions are valued and communicated within academia, potentially hindering faculty who wish to build careers focused on community-engaged work. The study explicitly addresses this as a core problem: the discrepancy between institution's public emphasis on outreach's societal benefits and its actual practical valuation in promotion and tenure processes.

The lack of clear and consistent standards for recognizing and rewarding outreach is perceived as a barrier, and the study aims to understand how university outreach is framed through communication to help address this real-world problem.

Limitations: The empirical decision-making process for university outreach communication is not extensively documented, particularly in research-intensive institutions, presenting a limitation. While a quantitative approach to analyzing communication dynamics is possible, this study employs a qualitative methodology. This qualitative study recognizes distinct contextual limits that may affect the transferability and depth of its results, in addition to the inherent complexity of empirical decision-making in university outreach communication, especially at research-intensive institutions. Research positionality: the researcher has a distinct perspective and expertise in the subject matter due to her long-term involvement as an observer-participant in different functional areas of higher education administration, specifically enrollment management and marketing communications. There is an inherent degree of research bias introduced by this insider perspective, which, although it enhances the interpretive lens and authenticates the lived experiences of university outreach personnel, is still there. Although reflexivity was used to avoid making assumptions and verify that the data drove the interpretation, the researcher's professional understanding and preconceptions still impacted how the inquiry was framed and the results were interpreted. Communication method for interviews: the modification of data collection for interviews, driven by participant desire, included obtaining replies to semi-structured questions using PDF documents sent via university-sponsored email, instead of conducting live synchronous interviews (e.g. via Zoom). This pragmatic technique facilitated the acquisition of extensive textual data reflecting informants' statements and viewpoints, but it hindered spontaneous engagement, nonverbal cues, and iterative probing

usually available through direct verbal communication. This approach may have constrained the instantaneous co-creation of meaning and the dynamic investigation of complex experiences.

Delimitations: The research may be limited in focus to a specific period, geographic area, or academic discipline. Expanding the scope across various time periods, locations, and education fields could enhance the study's relevance. The distinct features and interactions within the research setting may limit the ability to directly apply the results to broader groups or situations. The sample size of informants may not fully reflect the richness and variability of wider outreach activities. However, the study attempts to mitigate transferability limitations through triangulation of data collection (document analysis and interviews) and the provisions of detailed descriptions of the research context and findings.

Key phrases and terms

To understand this study's focus, below are elaborations with supporting details of key phrases and terms.

Actor-Network Theory is the key theoretical framework and sociological approach that helps this study explore how messaging moves, combines, and accumulates and examines how university outreach communication networks perform power dynamics.

Communication dynamics are the key channels and methods used by university outreach personnel to spread messages through digital infrastructure.

Higher education administration refers to the organizational context or lifeworld in which university outreach personnel operate. It is characterized by multiple complex and intertwined realities.

Phenomenology is the qualitative research method employed to understand how university outreach personnel subjectively and objectively relate to the phenomenon of outreach messaging.

Promotion (as a theme) is one of the three overarching thematic description examining how outreach is recognized and communicated through avenues such as awards, news, publications, and funding opportunities.

Textual expressions are the written materials found on university websites and in documents interpreted as representations of activities or information related to university outreach.

University outreach, a key area within higher education administration, aims to promote economic development and community engagement in alignment with the university's mission, vision, and goals.

University outreach personnel are individuals responsible for administering and coordinating university outreach at higher education institutions.

These terms are foundational to the research design and frame the investigation into how university outreach is described and communicated within higher education administration, particularly concerning its recognition for faculty career advancement.

Situating The Self

Something about the variety of events and types of people on a college campus has always been intriguing to me. I authored a paper in a media studies class about how a college campus promotes a distinct experience that is sometimes misleading for prospective students. Because I studied media business with a focus on marketing, I was beginning to understand the underbelly of student life and how media operates in higher education. With the guidance of my professor, I was able to conclude that higher education has a tough time with being transparent about campus life, especially with what is represented in tours, student stories, and program details. Though authoring the paper was just for my instructor's consumption, it guided me into a career in higher education marketing where I could influence how colleges attract and inform prospective students about their offerings and campus cultures.

Most of the holistic and professional development I gained as an undergraduate and graduate student was from the extracurricular activities I participated in. I was able to understand that I am a kinesthetic learner, who learns best from being hands-on. For example, being a student caller and chat operator in the enrollment management office where I was able to observe how events and initiatives coordinated by the institution were organized for student recruitment and retention. What came of this was a master's degree in higher education administration that led me to being a scholar-practitioner and pursue a doctoral degree in the same field.

Having a media and marketing studies background coupled with formal training in education organizational leadership, I was conditioned to approach working in enrollment management as a collaboration with academic advisors, student services staff, and faculty to implement targeted student recruitment and retention strategies. A substantial portion of the work we did was student-facing, which meant we gained a qualitative perspective of their needs and

advocated for them in meetings with executive leadership. Seeing the diverse needs of students intersected with those of my colleagues, turning my interest from enrollment management to communications in higher education.

As a graduate assistant in the offices of marketing communications and outreach, I learned about academic positions and how they relate to the university's reputation in the eyes of prospective students and the community at large. Though my major assistantship assignments at the university centered on research and outreach for multiple entities and communities, I noticed faculty were facilitating outreach and service to their students but were unfamiliar with extending their initiative beyond the students they regularly engaged with. This observation influenced me to volunteer my marketing expertise to support faculty structuring their efforts with comprehensive evaluation so that there was increased awareness of their outreach.

To be clear, their established efforts and accomplishments were recognized by departmental and university leadership, however my support was on addressing the marketing communications aspect of their initiatives and the development of clearly articulated collaborative strategies to inform, attract, and engage underserved graduate students. I turned my informal interest into a formal research study by focusing on the environmental redesign of outreach as a professional development effort to sharpen outreach communication strategies. Consequently, I broadened my scope to investigate how the structure of messaging outreach is directly related to faculty engagement.

So, that paper I wrote about higher education marketing as an undergraduate had more context and depth, which made me look further into how communications was utilized in the institution. I spent most of year three in doctoral school on interdisciplinary research exploring possibilities for re-framing institutional research as an archive, and in doing so, I decided to

operationalize the archive as a communication channel to promote positive information-seeking habits amongst graduate students. There were many resources available to support students in advancing their career or engaging in a growth activity, but there was a disconnect between how the resources were marketed and the level of engagement from students.

I was able to translate my qualitative perspectives into analyzing higher education policy and administration decisions from what I gathered anecdotally as an enrollment management specialist, which became important to my postgraduate research. Now that I have over a decade of experience in undergraduate and graduate enrollment management, the understanding I have about higher education is from an observer-participant perspective. It makes me a subject matter expert in the administration of higher education and enhances the credibility of my role in this study. The study is more thorough and genuine because I take on the position of an observer-participant and rely on my more than a decade of varied experience in different functional areas of higher education.

Dissertation Study Organization

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the introduction, outline the research problem, need, purpose, focus of inquiry, guiding research questions, theoretical frameworks, methodological overview, scope, limitations, delimitations, and key terms. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review, exploring the landscape of university outreach, its origins, functions, programs, benefits, drawbacks, and impact on society. This chapter also delves into the theoretical approach, discussing Actor-Network Theory in detail, and reviews existing literature on university outreach interactions and linkages. Chapter 3 details the research design, including the rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology, the specific approaches of phenomenology and actor-network theory, their philosophical and

methodological compatibility, the study setting, procedures, selection of informants and sampling logic, data sources, and data analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents the findings, reporting on the core aspects of university outreach messaging based on thematic descriptions derived from document analysis and interview responses. This chapter also provides a reflective comparison of findings in relation to actor-network theory and attempts to construct meaning from the results. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks of phenomenology and actor-network theory, organized by thematic descriptions (mission, vision, promotion) and presenting both textual and structural descriptions. This chapter draws together the concepts, integrates findings related to communication, technology, and documentation, discusses strategic implications, offers recommendations for future research, and provides concluding remarks summarizing the study's contribution. This dissertation concludes with references and appendices detailing coding and the document analysis guide.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The University Outreach Network Origins, Functions, and Dynamics of Communication

In undertaking this scholarly investigation, the overarching purpose is to critically analyze the broad spectrum of university outreach communication, particularly focusing on the messaging directed toward faculty by university outreach personnel. Using Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as the main framework, this study aims to understand how university outreach works as a functional area of higher education administration to connect and share messages about community involvement and public service scholarship within their networks.

The goal is to follow the actions and interactions in the university outreach network to show how higher education administration uses this area to affect or change other parts of the network, including how institutions define themselves and their authority. This analysis looks at the complicated rules that control how information moves and how meaning is created in the university outreach environment, suggesting that university outreach is a unique method within higher education administration.

The preceding literature review serves as a foundational exploration of the conceptual landscape of university outreach, providing the necessary context for the study's theoretical engagement. This review carefully follows the history of university outreach, showing how it changed from mainly focusing on agriculture in response to the Morrill Act of 1862 to now covering many fields and helping with state economic development and community advancement.

Aiming to look at how university outreach works in practice, this comprehensive review delineates the various functions and programs enacted by higher education administration to

form partnerships that balance the different priorities of faculty teaching and research with student access and enrollment. It is organized by themes, starting with a general overview of the historical foundations of university outreach, moving into sections about programming, faculty engagement challenges, centralized leadership and funding implications, and the importance of communication, and concluding with how university outreach functions as a network.

The Landscape of University Outreach: Origins, Functions, and Programs

Outreach in universities is not a fixed idea; it is a constantly changing mix of meanings, values, and goals influenced by how administrators express them and the specific actions they want to manage. University outreach refers to higher education institutions (HEIs) extending their resources, expertise, and service outside campus borders to connect with local communities, solve social concerns, and encourage knowledge diffusion (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). The description of university outreach by higher education administration can be viewed as a lived experience displayed through intentional institutional discourse and policy aimed towards fostering a particular relationship between the university and the community. This notion has developed to address the requirements of all people in terms of social, economic, and educational demands (Community Engagement, 2021; Hearn et al., n.d.; Lynton, 2016). The administration of higher education is the bridge between the academic institution and the broader community it inhabits and serves.

The Morrill Act contributed directly to the transformation of university outreach from its first focus on agriculture to its current role in driving economic development in higher education. Formerly known as the Land-Grant Act of 1862, the Morrill Act made it possible for states to build colleges and universities through legislation, changing the way working-class people could get an education. The initial goal was to educate the dominant working classes in agriculture,

military tactics, mechanic skills, and classical studies so that the United States economy might develop (Land-Grant University FAQ-APLU, 2024).

Outreach has expanded from its agricultural origins to encompass a wide range of disciplines within higher education, including but not limited to the sciences, humanities, and professional studies, to expand access for society to benefit from higher education (Hearn et al., n.d.; Morrill Act, 1862, 2022). This enduring commitment to serving the public good, as emphasized by Gavazi and Gee (2018), positions these institutions as critical agents in shaping a responsive and impactful future for higher education. University outreach initiatives have become a key component in connecting higher education to their local communities and constituencies beyond the institution (Hearn et al., n.d.). It serves many functions to advance economic and community development. For professors, scholarly outreach improves teaching, research, creative work, and service while addressing broader social challenges (Community Engagement, 2021). Community participants and service initiatives connect academic learning with real-world applications for students and university outreach personnel (Community Engagement, 2021).

The Consortium for Institutional Cooperation (CIC), now the Big Ten Academic Alliance, defines engagement as a term—regularly used interchangeably or in conjunction with outreach—as a “partnership of university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors (Doberneck, 2016). The purpose of this partnership is to “enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good” (Doberneck, 2016). Outreach also increases

enrollment, particularly among students who want to pursue further degrees or continue their studies in specialized fields (Hearn et al., n.d.).

Defining University Outreach. Here, service and engagement are framed as interchangeable terms with university outreach to emphasize the mutual flow of resources and knowledge between the university and the communities it serves. I decided to highlight the interconnected nature of these concepts by using university outreach as the singular terms to encapsulate them in this study. I chose to establish a connection between higher education texts and university outreach personnel as if it were a dialogue; despite its abstract nature, humans create and manage higher education through various processes. Basing my interpretation of the two terms within the context of etymology allows flexibility in its application to the administration of higher education and its' functional areas. The difference between service, which entails a stated obligation where individuals are bound to perform tasks for or at the direction of others, and outreach, which expands community involvement, is minor yet crucial.

Another definition of service includes the supply “of electricity, water, gas, etc. for domestic use,” which aligns with the definition of the “act of serving, occupation of an attendant servant” (Etymonline, n.d.). The term “outreach” especially refers to “an organization’s involvement in the community” (Etymonline, n.d.). It derives from the verbs “act or fact of reaching out” or “to extend or profer.”

In this research, service encompasses activities such as knowledge sharing, event coordination, and leadership development for the campus community. Outreach is defined as actions or behaviors directed toward the local or surrounding communities that have an interest in being affiliated with the university or require support in coordinating a special project. Service

is defined as a state of obligation where individuals are bound to perform tasks for or at the direction of others. A service's internal behaviors center on internal institutional-related tasks, whereas outreach's external behaviors aim to connect with stakeholders and communities outside of the institution.

Some higher education institutions use service in their policies to display community-facing activities but may not fully capture the reciprocal and scholarly dimensions inherent in the concept of engagement (Doberneck, 2016). It also encompasses activities such as knowledge sharing, event coordination, and leadership development within the campus community. The delicate differences in service to the university, the discipline, and the community highlight the more inclusive term outreach, which is defined as actions or behaviors directed toward the local or surrounding communities that have an interest in being affiliated with the university or require support in coordinating a special project (Doberneck, 2016).

The distinction lies in internal behaviors for service, which focus on tasks within the institution, and external behaviors for outreach, which target engagement with external communities and stakeholders. The external community includes faculty, staff, and professional organizations not enrolled in the university as students yet have a stake in supporting the institution's mission (Hearn et al., n.d.). Some administrations frame outreach and engagement as integral to the core academic mission, bridging the traditional silos of teaching, research, and service (Gregorutti, 2024). For this study, this is "teaching and research applied to the direct benefit of constituencies external to the university" (Muse et al., 2000). This perspective, exemplified by the 'world grant ideal' at Michigan State University, positions outreach as a transdisciplinary scholarship that generates, transmits, applies, and preserves knowledge for the

direct benefit of external audiences, aligning with university and unit missions (Gregorutti, 2024). Such descriptions move beyond the unidirectional view of the university disseminating knowledge to an understanding of co-creation of solutions with community partners (Gregorutti, 2024). This paradigm shift recognizes the nuanced cultural or technical knowledge held by community partners, enriching the research use process (Gregorutti, 2024).

University outreach has a wide reach, especially beyond the immediate campus environment, for collaborative partnerships between university outreach personnel and community stakeholders (Hearn et al.) Outreach efforts may also include cooperation with outside organizations in mutually beneficial alliances based on scholarship (Community Engagement, 2021; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). The main goals of university outreach are to improve academic programs' relevance and flexibility, strengthen social impacts, address societal concerns, and encourage community partnerships (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). As an example of what may fall under this category, one could help at events or even organize and lead seminars and discussions (Psychological Services, 2023; Saltmarsh et al., 2019). Opportunities to cultivate meaningful contacts may also arise by way of partnerships between faculty and staff teaching or working in schools and other groups, such as community centers, hospitals, and other non-profit organizations (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; District of Columbia, n.d.). What is more, outreach activities support faculty development by improving communication lines and encouraging them to explore practical elements of their profession (Hearn et al, n.d.).

University Outreach Programs

By supporting community development and enhancing the overall impact of higher education institutions, university outreach connects academia with society. Higher education's mission to develop links between the institution and the community is important to address

societal issues. Outreach activities are the avenue higher education institutions to take to contribute to the betterment of society, especially for the common good of all the communities they serve. Their responsibility to the community is also displayed through engagement initiatives that are critical for boosting the institution's reputation as a facilitator for community collaborations and fostering community relationships that advance social progress in a positive direction.

The most common way institutions target societal issues is through outreach programs that are coordinated to improve access to education, which often is through scholarships, mentorship programs, and resource allocation. Encouraging and supporting the diverse backgrounds of the communities they serve offers valuable learning opportunities, especially when engaging K-12 students so that they apply classroom concepts to in practical, real-world scenarios. Higher education institutions can significantly improve individual and communal well-being and quality of life by actively participating in and coordinating urban planning projects to rejuvenate neighborhoods and public health campaigns to advocate wellness and disease prevention (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). They are known to display their dedication to social responsibility and community service through active engagement in outreach, such as organizing workshops or events on entrepreneurship or environmental sustainability (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

What is more, programs that incorporate mentoring, tutoring, and college preparation are a factor in addressing educational disparities and promoting social advancement. They often involve partnerships with industries and small business owners, where university outreach personnel provide expertise and support for business development and innovation. These types of outreaches have residual implications for the relevance and adaptability of academic programs

because it connects them with the community's needs and interests (Boyer, 1996). Poverty, inequity, environmental degradation, and healthcare inequalities routinely demonstrate the urgent issues society needs to address with academia's expertise and research skills. This kind of participation is necessary because only through such involvement will there be room to take on a sense of personal responsibility for the development initiatives (Norton, 2014). Further engagement and support by universities that emphasize college access and awareness, have been implemented by Tulane University and Ohio State University as campus-specific initiatives that bring students to non-profit, governmental, or economic development programs (Colleges, 2021). Academic enrichment and job preparedness are major reasons why higher education institutions that cooperate with elementary and secondary schools sponsor college access programs.

The description of university outreach by higher education administration manifests in the context of institutional identity and strategic goals. Reputation of university outreach is mostly based on its alliances and cooperation with outside groups, particularly community leaders and organizations. Some universities leverage their engagement identity to differentiate themselves, attract enrollment, and bolster public and private support (Weerts, 2019). The emphasis on mutually beneficial relationships with the community can be a key aspect of an institution's brand and value proposition (Crookes et al., 2015; Weerts, 2019). University outreach personnel support the formation or maintenance of relationships between their institution and various stakeholders, including the community outreach initiatives (e.g., healthcare organizations, K-12 educators, and social service providers), and the community. These entities work together in concert to address intricate social challenges.

Mokher & Jacobson (2019) investigated the difficulties associated with expanding or integrating partnerships between secondary and postsecondary institutions. They found that there is a heavy lift of energy, a significant amount of time, and considerable attention needed to develop these types of relationships. Navigating competing priorities while cultivating and sustaining relationships for outreach programs may pose difficulties with respect to various organizations and stakeholders, limited resources, or loosely defined objectives. There are suggestions on how to bridge these gaps from scholars who all advocate for transparent communication drawing from shared understandings of meeting established goals (Bringle & Hatcher, 2001; Reed et al., 2018).

The Benefits and Drawbacks of Faculty Participation in University Outreach

An essential part of managing a university is ensuring that its outreach programs are founded on, and designed to achieve, the institution's stated goals and objectives. Research on university outreach has shown that university outreach personnel's opinions of outreach programs are influenced by formal administration, institutional employee support, and effective communication (Ní Chorcora et al., 2023). University outreach personnel in higher education are aware of the lack of consideration for how institutional support impacts the success and outcomes of community-based research and service-learning projects (Nicotera et al., 2011). They also face a conflict between recognizing the value of community engagement and concerns about the traditional academic reward system undermining long-term dedication to community work. What is more, there is a need for a clear definition of university-community-based work that goes beyond the expert model and emphasizes authentic collaboration (Nicotera et al., 2011).

There is a lack of uniformity in the distribution of funds to support university outreach programs, two essential resources. University outreach personnel face typical challenges of juggling heavy workloads under time constraints, limited funding and resource allocation, and competing priorities to attain recognition for faculty outreach and engagement scholarship. Students, faculty, staff, and administrators make up the bulk of university outreach personnel and should be the focus of any comprehensive study on university-community involvement (Hall, 2022). Perceptions, interpretations, and engagement with students and the community at large are all improved through trust building, collaboration, and the pursuit of successful results.

To foster a beneficial exchange of information and resources between community groups and university partners, it is crucial to define university-community-based work in a clear and specific manner. When there is a foundation of mutual respect and trust, it is possible to move forward with greater integration and achieve success. Irarrázaval et al. (2017) looked at how there is not a clear and specific definition of what public engagement means and who is responsible for it. They assert that the lack of widespread use of acknowledgement mechanisms hinders the integration of public engagement activities into universities' performance review systems (Irarrázaval & Valdivieso, 2017).

The issues with how universities use outreach affect university outreach personnel' perceptions of their participation in the reward and promotion system, especially tenure and promotion processes. The standards for the systems are often ambiguous and inconsistent. Higher education administration outlines the requirements for tenure and promotion, yet their criteria and methods fail to distinguish between strong and weak faculty consistently (Koekkoek et al., 2021). Rising faculty face constraints in dedicating time to engagement activities due to stringent tenure and promotion criteria, especially in institutions where there are no incentives or

recognition for participation (Justice, 2010). Chang (2000) reinforces the importance of university outreach in advancing university outreach personnel' career paths, specifically emphasizing the need for official acknowledgement and incentives.

In their 2015 article, Harden and Loving highlight the importance of outreach and involvement in creating support networks and advocating for university outreach personnel' needs. The academic community relies on moving up the academic ladder, as promotion equates to more agencies advocating for personal and communal needs to be met by the institution. University outreach personnel' ability to effectively implement outreach initiatives is highly dependent on their familiarity with and adherence to established policy requirements. Their ability to understand is influenced by the regulations that govern their institution's higher education system and their knowledge of financing sources that provide new paths for research, professional development, and outreach.

University outreach entails not only sharing information but also actively listening and addressing the campus community's needs and feedback. Adhering to ethical communication standards, such as transparency, confidentiality, and respect for privacy, is essential for establishing trust and credibility with stakeholders and safeguarding data privacy (Hillman & Ward, 2023). A common hinderance to university outreach personnel' participation in university outreach is the changing landscape of engagement with the community as the quality of digital communications are a requirement for employing diverse communication channels, like email newsletters. Communicating openly and honestly can help overcome obstacles to interpretation and enhance comprehension of the purpose of university outreach initiatives (Lasker et al., 2001).

An effective organizational leadership strategy for taking proactive action is to establish objectives that are well-defined, quantifiable, realistic, and achievable. For instance, some objectives for a community event may include enhancing involvement or participation by a particular percentage or organizing a set number of outreach events during a specified period. This might lead to more serious pursuit of institutional goals, resources, and outreach strategies.

According to an EAB study, although most strategic plans contain objectives, the majority fail to define relevant goals that may catalyze collective effort toward institutional outcomes (Attis, 2023). The lack of clarity in defining relevant goals undermines the efficacy of outreach activities by making it challenging to quantify success and the quality of impact. The research identified three common failure routes for strategic plans: setting goals that are impossible to measure, creating unrealistic objectives, and providing a list of actions instead of results (Attis, 2023). Clear goals and objectives for outreach activities may improve their success and create a sense of purpose and direction, which allows for better planning and resource allocation. By measuring progress against predefined goals, institutions also facilitate the evaluation of favorable outcomes and influence.

University outreach personnel that work to bolster institutional initiatives feel the effects of the difficulties they face with university outreach involvement. A more harmonious outreach environment may be created by bringing the university community together with strategic efforts such as goal-setting meetings or personalized communication plans, which help to align university communication with individual objectives. As an added downside, the institution's total advantage will be compromised if a considerable proportion of university outreach personnel are hesitant or unable to participate.

The Impact of Centralized Leadership on University Outreach and Financial Support in Higher Education

Higher education policy plays the most significant role in shaping the experiences and expectations of university outreach personnel, influencing areas such as funding allocations, reward system, and resource management. It can impact crucial aspects such as job security, career advancement opportunities, and the overall quality of working conditions. Additionally, it can influence the level of support and resources available for research and teaching, especially shaping the quality of education provided to students. This section leverages the researcher's extensive professional background in academia, encompassing work, service, and operation of organizational leadership over a decade.

Recognizing the emphasis on relationships between higher education policy and the academic profession, elaborates on the challenges faced by university outreach personnel and limitations on outreach initiatives. Policy choices can be influenced by university outreach personnel to varying degrees throughout time. Higher education policy determines priority of specific domains of outreach, which makes it challenging for university outreach personnel outside those areas to secure institutional resources for their outreach (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000). The competition for outreach resources may, also, influence the criteria for grants and funding eligibility (Hu et al., 2022; Hug & Aeschbach, 2020; Schaubroeck, 2022; "The Case for Lotteries," 2022).

In a special issue of *The Black Scholar*, an exploration of Octavia Butler's living thesaurus, *Fire, Laughter, Emeralds, and Rain*, highlights the investment required to 'unthink disciplinary formations and categories of knowing' such as traditions housed in higher education institutions Panaram (2022). 'In common sense understandings of higher education knowledge

practices, academics are employed to generate and modify knowledge, assess and challenge it, and to help others engage with it' (Fenwick & Edwards, 2014, p. 36). Over the past 20 years, the state's financial support for higher education continues to decrease (Cahalan et al., 2022; Jackson & Saenz, 2021; Kane & Orszag, 2003). Government incentives and methods used to formulate policies in higher education are subject to frequent changes, whereas academic careers are often longer-lasting (Smith et al., 2020). It is crucial to grasp understanding of these dynamics governing higher education policy that influences the focus and opportunities for outreach available to university outreach personnel (National Academy of Sciences et al., 2007). Those that direct and regulate outreach have an objective to promote research endeavors with the intention of enhancing economic growth and innovation (Hu et al., 2022).

University outreach is funded through various sources, such as government agency grants, private foundation grants, industry partnerships, internal university funding mechanisms, and community support (Dean's Office, 2023). When a government agency provides financial support in the form of a grant, it is often restricted to specific outreach projects and initiatives to meet student needs or enhance the quality of the academic environment. Similarly, private foundation grants fund programs that fund the foundation's mission rather than the institution's mission. Therefore, the institution must explicitly state how their goals for securing the grant align with the philanthropic goals of the foundation and its mission. Industry partnerships achieve a variety of collaborative outreach efforts through providing resources, industry expertise, and funding. Internal university funding is a mechanism that allocates resources or funding from the institution's budget. The community also has a stake in the university's outreach funding through donations or in-kind contributions that sustain outreach activities. In the chapter on perspectives, the Oxford Handbook of Economic Networks explains a concept on

package trances, which are blocks of assets, like cash or stocks controlled by a single organization (Bramouille et al., 2016).

Policy networks are complex systems where discussions occur, and the distribution of evidence that influences final policies is influenced by power dynamics (Smith et al., 2020). The structure of higher education is governed with synergy that is fueled by organizational decisions from a single organizational body, often times the board of trustees or the president's cabinet. This administrative approach controls how diverse sources of funding are contributed to the success and sustainability of university outreach efforts, which impacts the direction of resource allocation or the emphasis on achieving desired outcomes for targeted outreach communities. A Commonwealth Institute analysis emphasizes the evident repercussions of giving less resources to education, especially K-12 schools educating impoverished neighborhoods, and the need for improved allocation of resources for high-need schools The Commonwealth, 2017. This has the potential to perpetuate inequities into the university environment and impede outreach programs' capacity to successfully address community needs or prioritize allocating resources to K-12 outreach. A strong presence inside policy networks and the cultivation of long-lasting links are inseparably related to the legitimacy and credibility of higher education (Smith et al., 2020).

Communication in University Outreach

To effectively influence the target audience through university outreach initiatives, it is critical to craft persuasive messages that establish a profound connection. Creating messages that are both particular and unambiguous can enhance the usefulness and comprehension of communication strategies. (Lee & Kotler, 2011). Additionally, persuasive messaging that emphasizes the benefits and outcomes of engagement can increase the efficacy and desirability of initiatives (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014). Creating powerful messages that connect with the

intended audience, involving external stakeholders, and facilitating the exchange of information and experiences is a strategy to frame or highlight shared values to improve the attractiveness of outreach initiatives (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009).

Good outreach communication calls for inclusivity and cultural competence. Language plays a giant role in communicating university outreach within and outside the institution. University outreach employs volunteerism, knowledge transfer, service-learning, community engagement initiatives, and community-based participatory research to meet community needs (Dostilio, 2017). Potential obstacles, such as technological limitations or opposition to outreach approaches from stakeholders, present challenges for higher education administration, making it more difficult to recognize and honor diverse cultural norms, beliefs, and communication patterns, thereby hindering trust-building and facilitating quality interactions. (Hofstede et al., 2010). Constraints inherent to social media as a medium of communication include, among other things, information overload and the difficulty of differentiating the campaign from others, both of which might obstruct the precise targeting of the target demographic.

Assessing the effectiveness of communication strategies may assist in refining and enhancing data privacy protocols to ensure secure and influential information dissemination. Implementing language accessibility measures that include visual aids, or personalized messaging has the potential to reach more audiences and enhance community engagement initiatives. The type of feedback tools used in higher education have a qualitative nature and form the basis for providing ongoing improvements and advancement in meeting the changing needs of stakeholders (Bryson et al., 2012). More importantly, assessing outreach communication, which includes data on social media engagement, tracking attendance rates for

community events, and analyzing themes in feedback responses, may provide significant insights into the efficacy of messaging efforts.

Visual evidence, such as event photos, participant stories, and testimonies, may demonstrate the efficacy and the value of outreach. University outreach personnel often keep these records to prove the worth of faculty outreach and engagement scholarship to stakeholders, including grant organizations, university administration, and the public. The way higher education administration communicates university outreach influences the engagement of faculty in outreach and engagement scholarship. Research shows that satisfying the needs and desires of university outreach personnel and community partners is an integral aspect of a successful plan for campus community engagement (Barrera, 2015; Hall, 2022). Using a qualitative methodology, Leece and Jaquet (2017) investigated the following topics: the frequency and extent to which university outreach personnel in higher education integrate teaching and learning scholarship into their work; variations in how university outreach personnel communicate with senior administrators; and challenges and solutions to developing a professional identity for those who work across different departments in higher education.

A study by Hall (2022) is important, too, as a perspective on the presence of a community engagement policy and an informed and supportive university population, which may favorably influence university-community engagement. Including stakeholders in the planning and assessment process ensures their participation and ownership of outreach efforts while establishing strong connections essential for building trust, fostering teamwork, and understanding community expectations and perceptions (Cunningham-Erves et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2018). Scholars have conducted studies that provide significant perspectives on effective communication strategies (Johnson, 2023; Uleanaya et al., 2020). According to Uleanaya et al.

(2020), peers, the internet, and university events are the main avenues used to convey outreach programs. Instructional communication in higher education may be used to enhance the scholarship of teaching and learning and improve the work-life balance of university outreach personnel (Johnson, 2023).

At the local level, higher education administration has the capacity to concentrate on tailoring outreach communication through accessible documents on webpages, student service-illuminating video productions, or timely messages through learning management systems. Other technological advancements, like Blackboard, Canvas, and SharePoint, facilitate the translation of knowledge and enable seamless hosting spaces between university outreach personnel and the institution, regardless of physical location. A digital technology used to track the public is a customer relations management system (CRM) that uses data analytics to tailor activities, like outreach, through targeted email marketing, personalized web content, and the use of chatbots to provide on-demand, customized information (Ellucian, 2021).

These tools enable university outreach personnel to connect, communicate, and collaborate with each other or their intended audiences, increasing access to education and influencing administrative efficiency. Using technology mediums keeps higher education administration in a proactive operation mode that focuses on improvements for the changing requirements of stakeholders, especially when mixing feedback tools like surveys with focus groups or community forums (Bryson et al., 2012). These examples illustrate the advantages of university outreach by demonstrating how higher education formally recognizes collaborative methods for effective communication and facilitates career progression in faculty outreach and engagement scholarship.

Faculty tend to struggle with documenting or structuring their communication efforts for outreach activities at an organizational level. Though they utilize online platforms for collaboration and networking, such as LinkedIn or X, they have limited understanding of the role of technology in leveraging its potential to align their outreach efforts with the institution's mission or strategic goals. This challenge can impact their participation in the university reward system and their ability to contribute to strategic goals for university outreach. For example, they navigate the environment, struggling for resources, competing for funding, and pressured to publish and produce impactful research (Naseer, 2010). Faculty leveraging social media and digital platforms to provide access points of institutional knowledge or promote events or programs is the type of facilitation that displays their capacity to be flexible, engaging and provide a unique perspective of the campus culture.

Networks as Outreach Activities

Communication serves as both an object of higher education and a connection between higher education, outreach, and personal learning, all of which guide the career paths of faculty. The constant and unfaltering stability it provides is noteworthy for the long-term advantage of faculty career progression. Therefore, as an outreach activity, a personal learning network of individuals who engage in collaborative learning outside of their discipline or personal practice fosters knowledge exchange and professional growth. 'Personal learning networks are free personal learning tools that cross boundaries of time, location, and access to like-minded people...characterized by sustained, collaborative, coherent, and job-embedded learning that leverages both traditional and digital pathways' of communication and knowledge transfer (Sheninger, 2019, pp. 145 & 143). These communication activities, such as online conferences, newsletters, or learning management systems, allow university outreach personnel to expand the

reach of outreach initiatives. This is particularly beneficial for promoting faculty outreach and engagement scholarship.

Conversely, higher education administration describes university outreach in a manner that recognizes it as a form of faculty work but secondary to the more traditional valued functions of research and teaching (Doberneck, 2016). While acknowledging outreach, the institutional mission of academic excellence may not place as much emphasis on its role and impact in these instances. Some institutions, as revealed in the study of CIC policies, do not explicitly recognize or encourage outreach and engagement within their promotion and tenure frameworks (Doberneck, 2016).

Time is a critical factor in developing the prevailing educational discourses in higher education. Because higher education administration advances at a slower pace than society's demands, an understanding of fundamental psychological processes that deal with both the here and now and future possibilities is necessary for a high-quality digital process (Baumeister & Alquist, 2023). Faculty who volunteers their time to collaborate outside their teaching and research responsibilities share a common goal of improving outcomes for students or the community. They broaden their opportunities to make a difference within a personal learning network and advance institutional outreach, where they use free access to academic research, connect with aligned researchers and research institutions known for their expertise, or hire researchers to get the necessary research or consulting guidance (Smith et al., 2021, p. 41). An enhanced comprehension of social phenomena, in this context of university outreach, across several temporal dimensions—past, present, and future—may be helpful when considering the notion of time (Smith et al., 2020). For instance, they could develop their communication, leadership, and critical thinking skills to support their pursuit of tenure and promotion because

they remove time and place restrictions, digital technologies and online platforms have made it simpler to communicate and engage with like-minded audiences.

University Outreach Impact on Society

Engaging in outreach activities enables university outreach personnel to share knowledge, influence or impact, and gain recognition within their field or community. Studies have explored the relationship between outreach activities and faculty's career advancement in higher education. For instance, tenure and promotion outcomes positively correlate with engagement in outreach activities (Oaks et al., 2009). However, the impact of outreach on career advancing varied depending on the discipline and institution (Lake et al., 2017). Building upon these existing studies, policy making in higher education is no longer a purely rational-technical process, but rather an interpretative process that incorporates a range of added information and factors (Churchill, 2023). This dynamic environment requires faculty to continually adapt and respond to changing contexts and demands, especially with different expectations and rewards systems in the hard sciences compared to the humanities.

Higher education administration is a complex environment; university outreach has demonstrated its power, as a functional area of the educational enterprise, on an individual and institutional level. On an individual level, outreach provides students with experiential learning opportunities, skill development, and enhance their involvement in civic engagement (Mebert et al., 2020). At the institutional level, outreach activities improve brand reputation, foster stronger connections with the community, and help facilitate meeting societal expectations for the common good (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011).

Building upon this understanding of the relationship between higher education environment and university outreach, Tierney and Lanford argue that the academic profession is a mosaic of disciplines nested in institutional contexts, defining cultural norms, values, rewards, and expectations (2018). For example, a prestigious research university may place a strong emphasis on research productivity and grant funding with expectations for faculty to excel in their research endeavors (Huenneke et al., 2017). In contrast a small college may prioritize teaching excellence and student engagement, valuing the impact university outreach personnel have on their students' education (Reder, 2014).

These different institutional contexts create or maintain distinct cultural layers and norms within the profession, which can influence research focus, teaching methodologies, and the direction of faculty professional aspirations. The context, which includes sensitivity to time and space, both plays out and limits the feasible actions of faculty engaging in university outreach (Smith et al., 2020, p. 41). Being a member of the academic community requires being creative as an educational leader and researcher where this creativity allows control of who can buy or sell higher education as a product or service. Faculty have an unofficial role as gatekeepers for the institution to establish or maintain a cultural divide between society and the education environment, 'inevitably constrained or guided by time in these different worlds and spaces' (Smith et al., 2020, p. 42).

However, human nature often misinterprets messages conveyed solely through handbooks or text formats. Physical infrastructure no longer restricts higher education; digital tools allow access anytime and anywhere. Current trends and future direction in university outreach are constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of students and communities where

the creativity of university outreach personnel will produce and translate their knowledge to benefit and boost the promotion of community welfare.

A direction that will benefit university outreach can be through using online, like social media (Andersen & MoldStud Research Team, 2024) or virtual reality experiences, to expand its reach with audiences outside the local community. Though websites and email are familiar digital platforms to communicate with the internal campus community, posting content like articles, videos, infographics, or even podcasts are approaches to reframe communication methods in modern ways. While online platforms are already in use for collaboration and networking, faculty disseminating research that extends influence beyond academia to policymakers, practitioners, and the public is advantageous to university outreach so that it's simpler to communicate scholarship and remove barriers of time and place for engaging with audiences (Williams & Sutanto, 2024).

Regularly updating profiles and engaging with followers involves defining clear objectives, choosing appropriate platforms based on audience demographics, and creating compelling content, there can be limitations (Andersen & MoldStud Research Team, 2024). Understanding how to leverage this technology effectively to align their outreach efforts with institutional goals requires institutional support and strategic integration of digital communication to maximize the potential of these tools. The integration of digital technologies within the university outreach network could be leveraged:

Using digital tools like blackboard, canvas, or Sharepoint to facilitate knowledge translation and create shared online spaces. Personalize email marketing and web content through data analytics for targeted outreach activities employing customer relationship

management systems (Ellucian, 2021). Providing virtual events like campus tours, webinars, or live Q&A sessions to connect with community partners who cannot visit campus in person (Andersen & MoldStud Research Team, 2024). Exploring video content for showcasing campus life, incorporating student testimonials with features like stories, polls, and hashtags, and event highlights from user-generated content, noting its prioritization in platform algorithms to reach younger audiences (Andersen & MoldStud Research Team, 2024). Developing a three-stage digital approach involving a dedicated website, creating engaging online experiences (potentially using VR-ready 3D spaces), and hosting online events or workshops.

Theoretical Approach: Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

Actor-network theory has the leading role in this inquiry by analyzing the hybrid characteristics of communication and its profound effects on higher education. Utilizing ANT in this research allows for the study to explore how and in what forms university outreach personnel as a function of higher education administration move, combine, and accumulate messaging university outreach to faculty within the motions of community engagement and public service scholarship (adapted from Pg. 23, Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Viewing university outreach from the ANT perspective is a frame that explores “the micro-links and rivulets flowing within and across what we take for granted to be this thing or that” (Pg, 148, Actor-Network Theory in Education; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

According to actor-network theory, human society and the natural environment are both interdependent systems. Nothing, it argues, exists apart from these tangible and semiotic connections (Nickerson & McLeod, 2023). It is a way of thinking about how things are included or left out, how links work, and how associations are strengthened so that they stay stable and last a long time by connecting with other networks and things (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 4).

Conversely to what they signify, ANT emphasizes the function of texts and other entities (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p.8).

History of ANT. Following its establishment by Bruce Latour at the Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation (CSI), the ANT framework has found extensive application across a multitude of academic fields, such as sociology, economics, anthropology, geography, feminism, linguistics, and the more expansive social sciences (Akrich, 2023; Latour, 2005). Latour, an architect of ANT, was a part of group, with Michel Callon and others at the CSI, that emphasized their work was not aimed at proposing a close of hypotheses and concepts to explain the world or certain phenomena. Actor-network theory is a sociological approach and theoretical framework that treats everything in the social world, especially power dynamics and organizations, as webs of relations within the network they are located (Law, 1992; Law, 2008). The hyphen between actor and network, coined by John Law who synthesized the work at the CSI, makes a unique perspective on ontology and reconceptualization of the explanatory power and ideals of a social phenomenon (Akrich, 2023; Sarauw, 2016). The theory emphasizes understanding the connections between ideas and objects, favoring agnosticism, generalized symmetry, and free association.

It has evolved and been gradually unraveled as a method for inquiry, with the uptake of ideas from the wider fields of Science and Technology Studies (Tummons, 2021), and even broader educational research. "ANT sensibility helps to expose myriad trails and ties among all the minute objects, actions, texts and talk in an activity, the researcher is forced to explicitly choose and declare which will be followed and which will be excluded." (Pg. 151, Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Texts, particularly technological texts, control, direct, monitor, shape, consolidate, and inscribe what comes to be valued as knowledge (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p.

8). “Indeed, the texts of new technologies are shifting and demanding new forms of engagement and exerting new forms of control” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 8).

Navigating Networks using ANT. ANT serves as a map for navigating networks and accounts for the postmodern concept with reflexivity (Kien, 2009). “Its ideas are best utilized as an approach, sensibility, and method for understanding, rather than a totalizing theory of the world and its problems” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 5). Some users resist defining the theory in a specific way, preferring instead to the possibility of a multiplicity of versions (Tummons, 2021). ANT’s network ontology is useful for analyzing contexts in educational studies of learning, pedagogy, and curriculum. It highlights the relational nature of all things, as well as the dynamics of power and the circulation of forces in networks (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 12).

A central idea in ANT is translation, which describes the process by which human and non-human things interact with one another, transforming one another in the process (Latour, 1987). ANT also explores the role of translation in networks, highlighting the power dynamics and strategies involved in the process (Law, 1992). The movement of power is facilitated through networks of actors that reshape and translate it (Kien, 2009). Specifically, it influences the dissemination of written materials, such as text expressions on websites, which facilitates communication across temporal and spatial boundaries.

According to ANT, power is not something possessed by individuals but rather an effect of performance (Kien, 2009). It involves a paradox where having power means having unused potential, while using power means others are performing for one’s benefit (Kien, 2009). Fenwick and Edwards suggest that the authority of knowledge in higher education is more precarious than commonly assumed and is sustained by multifarious associations and activities

(2013). Authority figures are seen as part of an “administrative machinery” that resists individuation in translation (Kien, 2009). In other words, higher education administration responds to the fluctuations of faculty engagement with university outreach through adopting modern technologies as forms of controlling their perception of its organization.

ANT raises important questions about how people, representations, and artifacts move, combine, accumulate, and get hooked up with other networks (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 23). Universities are categorized in numerous ways, including being enacted through academic practice, moving through different operational models, and being sites of collaborative and conflicting cultures and practices (Tummons, 2021). In their study, Czahajda et al. (2022) use actor-network theory to understand how networks function and develop. Specifically, they investigated the influence of communication on personal learning networks and career progression. ANT, by deliberate placement and sharing of information, improves the capacity of networks to withstand disruptions and encourages uniform actions, allowing networks to successfully overcome obstacles and sustain operational stability in many organizational contexts (Nickerson & McLeod, 2023). ANT provides valuable insights into networks’ dynamics and ability to overcome resistance of black boxes in networks that appear immutable and inevitable and achieve coherence instead of concealing negotiations that brought them into existence (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 11).

According to Fenwick and Edwards (2020, p. 16), networks are collections of resources that have been translated and connected. ANT explains material culture by mapping relationships between actors and actants that give rise to phenomena (Kien, 2009). The statement underscores the notion that networks are perpetually incomplete and indistinct, with multiple networks striving for efficacy and gaps, voids, and breaches prevalent (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 4).

In educational research, ANT highlights the importance of material things in shaping processes such as educational policy, workplace learning, curriculum-making, technology implementation, and evaluation activities (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Higher education could benefit from a network sensibility that recognizes the negotiated processes through which knowledge is entangled with the social to produce actions, subjectivities, and ideas (Fenwick & Edwards, 2013).

ANT has been critiqued for its focus on powerful actors and its role in Othering, but it has also generated counter-narratives and alternative perspectives (Law, 2008). A study by Pokorny (2024) on using ANT in approaching Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), along with an investigation by Naidoo-Chetty & du Plessis' (2021) into the 'Job Demands and Job Resources of Academics in Higher Education' highlight the impacts of reskilling job resources faced by students and the work demands for faculty in higher education. More specifically, the RPL is useful for developing support structures that translate knowledge outside higher education incorporating portfolio evidence to align personal learning with academic language. While they do not directly address university outreach programs, their studies give insights into the obstacles and resources available in higher education, which may impact faculty engagement with, and interpretations of, outreach initiatives. Analyzing the narratives and interpretations provided by participants allowed the researchers to understand how these activities are perceived and their influence on professional development as an infinite network of actors.

Though ANT advances three methodological principles: agnosticism, generalized symmetry, and free association, I choose to focus on the first and last. The principle of agnosticism abandons assumptions that I have as a researcher about the nature of university outreach communication, what causes the messages to form, and the accuracy of the accounts of

university outreach by university outreach personnel. The quality of academics should be as inbred to both people and non-human actors, foregrounding the principle of symmetry (Tummons, 2021). Generalized symmetry, as a principle, is a single frame that explains human and nonhuman interpretations of actants (Nickerson & McLeod, 2023; Fenwick & Edwards, 2012). Free association is the principle that stands firm on the argument that there is no absolute separation between the natural, the technological, and the social (Nickerson & McLeod, 2023). The principles of agnosticism and free association encourage looking at things from different points of view and questioning hierarchical structures.

“In a real sense, the very notion of actor–network itself inscribes this symmetrical approach; an actor is a network and vice versa” (Pg. 9, Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Earlier explanations of ANT distinguish “the working entity is an actor with agency, that which goes into the network to enable this activity is the actant.” In this study, the working entity is higher education administration; the network is university outreach. So then, higher education administration is the actor with agency that goes into university outreach to enable messaging and communication to faculty. Another set of descriptors includes tokens of networks, also explained as mediators and intermediaries. A mediator, text expressions, circulate through the network, transforming, distorting, and modifying the meaning of the messaging elements it is to conduct (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 11). Communication is the intermediary that ‘transports’ the meaning of university outreach, without acting on it to change it (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 11).

Translation is emphasized as the primary mode of interaction between actants, with knowledge and morals being seen as provisional (Kien, 2009). For instance, university administration ensures compliance with policies, department heads oversee academic projects,

technology platforms facilitate communication, and social networks enhance community involvement. This research might identify the power dynamics and negotiations that define university outreach by evaluating the links and interactions between these variables.

University Outreach: Interactions and Linkages. Actor-network theory frames how data collected is analyzed as university outreach text expressions are unraveled. “Regardless of the starting point, an ANT approach focuses as soon as possible on the most local, particular details of a thing or actor as they go about the micro-activities of their day” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 148). Findings are discussed as networks that perform power dynamics of higher education administration acted out by technological mediums and university outreach personnel.

The interactions between university outreach personnel and the technological mediums employed to communicate university outreach messages about activities, efforts, or initiatives to faculty is illustrated in the following concept map. The aim is to trace the actions of university outreach personnel in the university outreach network to provide an account of how higher education administration can use this functional area as an approach where the network expands or contracts, to shape or reshape other elements of the network as definitions or positions of authority (Sarauw, 2016; Pokorny, 2024). Learning on the process of translation to reflect this power and encouragement, the conceptual map illustrates the interconnected operations within higher education administration.

As an attempt to make the concept of translation applicable to university outreach communication, the aim is to recognize or promote faculty engagement and scholarship for the promotion and tenure (P&T) process in higher education administration. The following section is a textural map detailing how the different human and nonhuman actors are brought together and

aligned within this context to inform potential strategic recommendations for senior leadership. I map the intricate web of relationships and transformations required for faculty outreach work to successfully translate into recognized P&T criteria. This goes beyond simply listing requirements; it's about understanding the active roles and interactions of all involved entities, human and non-human.

Under the framework of ANT, the university outreach context for P&T recognition is understood as a heterogeneous network or assemblage (Law, 1992). This network is composed of diverse materials and entities, both human and nonhuman, which constantly interact and share meanings, resources, and actions. Applying the principle of generalized symmetry, I describe all actors in the same terms before describing how they are all brought together.

The university (as an actant/central hub): the university is the overarching entity and a central actant. It's strategic goals for outreach and faculty development set the initial conditions for the network. The alignment process: the university's identity and goals need to be translated into specific policies, resource allocations, and administrative structures that support and value outreach.

Outreach policies and P&T Guidelines (nonhuman actants/texts): these are significant non-human shapers. They are not just inert rules but active actants that influence how activities are implemented, managed, and, critically, evaluated for P&T. P&T documents specify what counts as teaching, research, and outreach and the standards for evaluation. The alignment process: policies translate the university's outreach goals into actionable requirements and expectations. P&T guidelines translate (Law, 1992) what the university values for advancement into criteria. These nonhuman texts require interpretation and implementation by human actors.

The dynamic nature of policy choices demonstrates their active role in the network over time. The description also frames policy as influencing funding allocations, reward systems, and resource management, impacting job security and career advancement for faculty. This illustrates how policy, as a non-human actant, perform power by structuring possibilities and constraints within the network.

Administration (human actors/dynamic element/network): It is framed as an actor with agency, controlling the contribution of diverse funding sources and influencing policy choices. Applying ANT, the administration is understood not as a single entirely, but a network of various actors and processes that exercise authority. As the bridge between the academic institution and the broader community, administration expresses, meaning values, and goals, and manages specific actions related to outreach. They control funding, influence policy choices, and manage processes like P&T. The administration's communication style also impacts faculty engagement in outreach scholarship. The alignment process: the administration translates university goals and policies into directives and resource allocations for university outreach departments and personnel. They must also translate faculty outreach work into the P&T evaluation process, interpreting guidelines and managing review committees. This process is complex and can encounter resistance or be reshaped.

Faculty and university outreach personnel (human actors /mediators): faculty perform outreach activities facilitated and managed by outreach personnel, all are central actors who translate institutional goals and policies into concrete actions. They are also directly affected by the network dynamics, including policies and P&T requirements. Personnel act as mediators between the institution, faculty, and community. These individuals are key to the lived experience of outreach, translating institutional goals like teaching, research, and service

activities into concrete actions that address social challenges. Their ability to effectively implement initiatives depends on their familiarity with policies and funding sources. However, their participation is subject to challenges such as limited resources, competing priorities, along with the ambiguity of traditional academic reward systems regarding outreach scholarship. The alignment process: faculty and outreach personnel translate institutional policies practices through their expertise and interests into outreach activities and must translate their activities into documentation that aligns with P&T criteria. Their actions or inactions reshape the network's efficacy.

Technology (nonhuman/mediators/coded materialities): technological mediums like websites, databases, reporting systems, and digital communication tools are crucial nonhuman actants. They are not mere conduits but actively shape interactions and facilitate the translation of knowledge and documentation. Digital tools are increasingly intertwined with scholarly practices, acting as co-researchers that shape action, mold decisions, and influence relationships. Software interfaces, for instance, can configure and circumscribe researchers' actions and define what is relevant for reporting. It is important to note the data sent by each kind of computer-mediated communication is different (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 185). The alignment process: technology translates activities and information into digital formats for communication and documentation. The design of P&T reporting systems or faculty activity databases translates policy requirements into specific data entry tasks, thereby aligning faculty reporting practices with evaluation needs. Technology mediates the interaction between faculty, administration, and P&T committees by providing platforms for submitting and reviewing outreach documentation.

Documentation of outreach work (nonhuman actants/texts/artifacts): These are material forms that embody the knowledge or actions of outreach, this includes reports, publications,

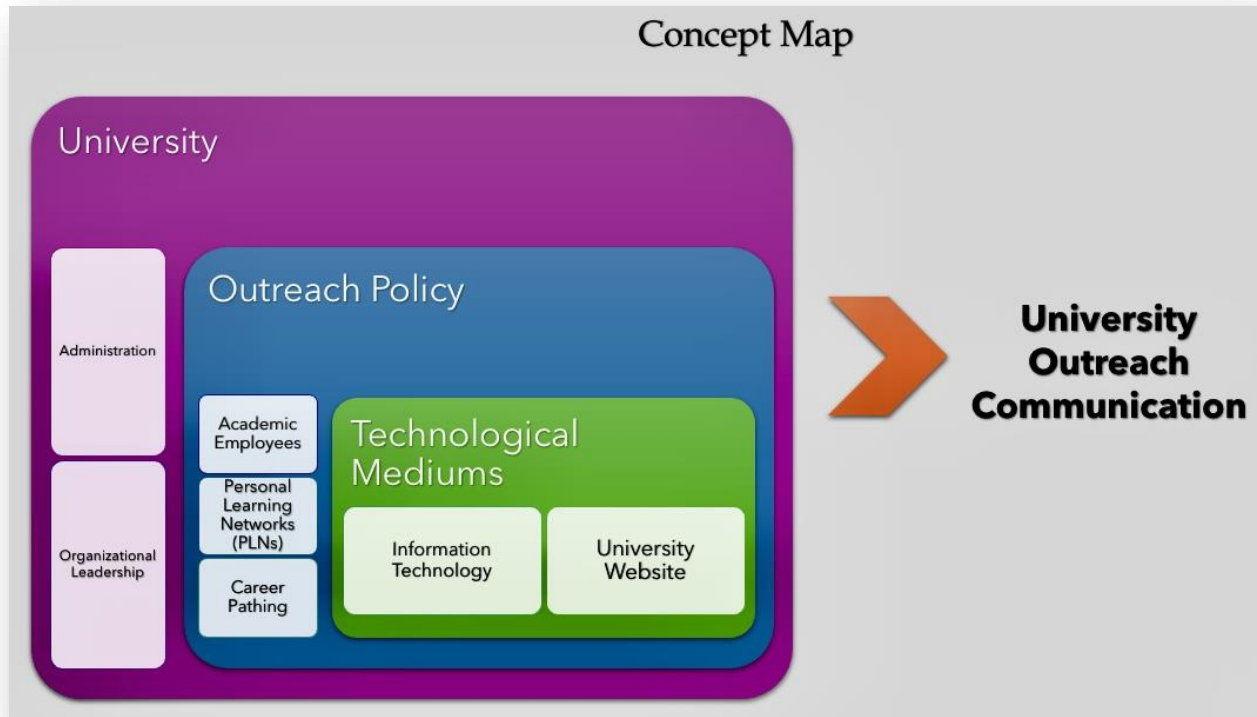
digital records, community testimonials, etc. They are artifacts created through human effort and technology, intended to represent activities to others. The alignment process: documentation translates the dynamic process of outreach activity into stable form that can be evaluated for P&T. The creation of these documents requires translation, often involving selecting, organizing, and presenting information in a way that aligns with the expectations and criteria of the P&T committee. Freezing dynamic digital data into static artifacts is a key translation practice here.

Funding sources or grants (nonhuman actants/resources): external or internal funding opportunities act as nonhuman actants that can shape the network by making certain outreach activities possible or attractive. The alignment process: securing funding translates potential projects into realize activities. Funding requirements can also influence how activities are structured and documented, thus indirectly aligning them with reporting needs.

Promotion and tenure committee or external reviewers (human actors): these are human actors responsible for evaluating the translated documentation of faculty work based on the P&T guidelines. They interpret the documented outreach and translate it into decisions about promotion and tenure. The alignment process: the committee must translate diverse forms of outreach documentation into a judgment based on standardized P&T criteria. The clarity and comprehensiveness of the documentation (nonhuman actant) significantly influence the success of this translation.

Community partners or beneficiaries (human actors/networks): the external community is a critical part of the outreach network. Their needs, engagement, and feedback (actions, texts, networks) influence the nature of faculty outreach. The alignment process: faculty and the university administration translate community needs into outreach programs using

documentation. That may include translating community feedback or impact into forms understandable for academic evaluation, further linking the external network to the internal P&T network.



How They are Brought Together and Aligned

University strategies are translated into policies and guidelines. Policies and guidelines are translated into administrative processes and expectations for university outreach personnel and faculty. Faculty and university outreach personnel translate institutional goals and community needs into outreach activities. Outreach activities are translated into documented evidence, often using technology. This documentation process involved translating dynamic work into static forms. Technology translates human actions and information into digital formats for communication, storage, and reporting. It's design influences how documentation is created

and submitted. Documentation is translated by P&T committees and reviewers into evaluations against the P&T criteria. Funding translates possibilities into actualities, influencing which activities are performed and documented.

For instance, an outreach policy (non-human actant) is translated into practice by university outreach personnel (human actant) using a university website (nonhuman actant) to communicate an event (action) to the community (human actants). The success or failure of this translation depends on the strength and alignment of the connections within the network, including factors like clear communication, resource allocation, and recognition. In this ANT framework, no single entity holds power; rather, the collective performance of these linked actants produces the effect. The network's ability to achieve its goals depends on the successful translation and alignment of the efforts of all its human and nonhuman components.

This entire process is a continuous performance. The power to successfully recognize outreach for P&T is not inherent in any single actor but is an effect produced by the collective performance and alignment or misalignment of this heterogeneous network. The success hinges on the strength of these translations and the ability of the network to hold together despite potential resistance from any of its components. For instance, faculty may resist documenting their work if the technology is cumbersome, policies are unclear, or P&T criteria are ambiguous. Administrators may struggle to translate diverse outreach efforts into standardized evaluation metrics. Technology might fail or be poorly designed, disrupting the documentation process.

Their interactions are processes of translation, constantly shaping and reshaping the university outreach network. This study aims to understand these dynamics, looking at how ideas, resources, and actions move and change through the network, showing the complicated

ways that influence and power work together to help universities engage with the community. The following chapters provide a richer understanding of the mechanisms employed by universities to show the complex challenge of aligning diverse human and nonhuman actors through effective translation processes, so that they extend their reach and interact with the broader society.

Exploring the Literature Review for New Insights. This literature review provides a fundamental theoretical and conceptual basis for the subsequent empirical inquiry. A detailed examination of the history, roles, challenges, and communication aspects of university outreach, along with an explanation of Actor-Network Theory, has created a foundation for a thorough analysis of how network dynamics influence higher education administration of university outreach. The ambitious nature of communication mechanisms and the intricate translation process demonstrate the importance of this study and necessitates a qualitative methodology that can elucidate the complex interactions among many stakeholders in the university outreach network.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Overview. In this chapter, I introduce qualitative research methodology and explain the choice of using a qualitative design for exploration, concluding with details on the research design. I have chosen to study university outreach as a lived experience provided by university outreach personnel who administer higher education. Additionally, I explain the relevance of using phenomenology to explore the individual experiences of university outreach personnel who hold decision-making positions in higher education administration, along with actor-network theory as a method to describe the interconnections between higher education and the executing of university outreach communications. This chapter demonstrates a solid attempt at combining interpretive frameworks as a qualitative research design to examine text expressions.

Qualitative Research Methodology

Qualitative research is conducted when a problem or issue needs to be explored, when a literary and flexible style of writing is desired, when existing theories are inadequate, or when the uniqueness of individuals in a study should not be overlooked (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 46). These assumptions relate to ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how it is justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the research process) (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 19).

A significant benefit of qualitative research is that it allows researchers to analyze and interpret the same experience multiple times, facilitating a more profound understanding of the phenomenon over time. Philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks influence the design of a qualitative study. A ‘good’ qualitative study is characterized by using a defined approach, with citations of studies that employ it, and adherence to the procedures outlined in the

approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 48). The study should accurately reflect the complexities of real life and engage the reader (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 49).

Why Qualitative Research? Qualitative research is well-suited to this study on university outreach for a couple of reasons. First, this study is an exploration of the culture of higher education administration. Second, the focus is on learning the meaning that informants hold about how university outreach is communicated by higher education administration, rather than imposing the researcher's own meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 44).

Qualitative research methods align with exploring an understanding of the lived experiences and meanings that individuals ascribe to those experiences (Seidman, 2019). The goal is to be a flexible, open-ended approach to understand complex worlds and individual actions, not to test or evaluate hypotheses (Seidman, 2019). Qualitative inquiry creates themes directly from the data rather than engaging in quantitative analysis.

So, this study uses the qualitative approach of phenomenology to seek out those individual experiences of university outreach personnel administering higher education, as well as actor-network theory to inquire into the interconnected relationships within university outreach in higher education. ANT encourages a focus on the multiple forms, lines, and textures of materials that come together in diverse ways to produce effects (Fenwick & Edwards, p. 20). It challenges neat developmental teleology and offers a method for picking apart a priori categories and structures in education (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 22).

Qualitative research is inherently descriptive, achieving description in diverse methods, such as narrative, case studies, grounded theory, and ethnography. The primary methods for data collection in phenomenology include document analysis, observations of publicly accessible

university webpages, and in-depth interviews that provide additional context from individuals who have lived the experience or phenomenon. A key feature of phenomenology is providing a thick, rich description of the collected data and reporting on the commonalities (or essences found in the shared experiences).

Creswell and Poth say that qualitative research should be thorough, organized, and well-documented, using different methods to sort and simplify the data into something easier to handle (2018, pp. 57-58). We categorize and code the data into segments before sorting and organizing them through comparison, contrast, and labeling. Data sources for analyses can include transcribed conversations, interviews, observations, diaries, films, document analyses, or unusual forms of data that accurately reflect the complexities of real life (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201; Seidman, 2013; Crawford, 2020, p. 86). The “sorting can involve making frequency counts of the data, developing categories or typologies to account for all the data, selecting concepts that define relationships among categories, and formulating working hypotheses or assertions that explain the data” (Schwandt, 2015, pp. 57-58). This sorting process is also a reassembly of the parts to understand the integrity of the whole (Schwandt, 2015, p. 57).

Phenomenology and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Understanding how university outreach personnel conceptualize and document their service and outreach efforts is beneficial for assessing the impact of outreach activities on community engagement and professional growth. To begin with, this study may raise awareness of the efficacy of current higher education outreach policies and procedures. Second, how university outreach personnel make sense of their outreach and service responsibilities can help inform professional development and support programs tailored to their needs. However, the focus of this study is on the structure of the

communication dynamics used by higher education administration to engage university outreach personnel in university outreach.

Phenomenology is a research methodology that focuses on the lived experiences of individuals and how they subjectively and objectively relate to a common phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 76). It exists on a continuum between qualitative and quantitative research approaches “(Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 76). The research question in ANT is the organization of the world, not the anticipation of theoretical or methodological application. (Sarauw, 2016). “ANT can show how things are invited or excluded, how linkages work, and how associations are bolstered to make themselves stable and durable by linking to other networks and things” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 4).

Moustakas and van Manen’s philosophical ideas focus on studying people’s conscious lived experiences and describing their essences rather than explaining or analyzing them (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). ANT’s founding architect, Bruno Latour, explored Heidegger’s distinction between objects and things, challenging traditional notions of approaches to considering historical and intriguing objects in philosophy (Latour, 2004). The process may be gradual, incomplete, delayed, or lead to weak connections or disconnections, but it can also build networks that are stable and long-lasting (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 10; Kien, 2009).

There are various approaches to phenomenology in human, social, and health science research. The American Psychological Association defined an approach of phenomenology by Heidegger as a structured framework where informants share their experiences for researchers to interpret (Smith & Nizza, 2021). Also, Smith and Nizza (2021) described double hermeneutic phenomenology, in which the researcher and the participant work together to interpret a

phenomenon to gain a collective understanding. According to Giorgio, researchers should read to obtain a feel for the big picture, break down meaning into smaller parts, make participants' expression more psychologically sensitive, and finally describe what they see as the essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201).

The lifeworld of higher education administration is the “essential structure of consciousness” that university outreach personnel experience (Schwandt, 2015, p. 234). University outreach is a phenomenon university outreach personnel experience through believing, feeling, evaluating, and all experiences of bodily action (Schwandt, 2015, p. 234) in a unique way, which makes it a valuable subject to study in the applied setting of higher education administration. “Researchers have had the ability to access data online for only about two decades; thus, qualitative research in the Internet age is a continually changing landscape and one that offers infinite research possibilities” (Marotzki et al., 2014) as cited by Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 183). This research follows Moustakas' transcendental approach, drawing insight from van Manen's foundational research activities, which involve systematic steps in the data analysis procedure and provides guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 77-78; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 227).

These activities form a dynamic interplay in the phenomenological process, including turning to a phenomenon, reflecting on essential themes that constitute the nature of the lived experience, and writing a description of the phenomenon while maintaining a strong relation to the topic of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 77). The researcher brackets, also known as *epoche*, themselves out of the study by acknowledging their individual experiences with the phenomenon but setting them aside to focus on the experiences of the informants. The data analysis process follows systemic procedures, starting with narrow units of analysis, moving into

broader units, and finally providing detailed descriptions of what individuals have experienced and how they have experienced it. The culmination of a phenomenological study is the identification of the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 77). Emphasizing the essence of the university outreach communication on its own terms is vital in this study to capture the true depth and authenticity of higher education administration.

Philosophical and methodological compatibility. In qualitative research, interpretive frameworks, such as paradigms, theories, or theoretical orientations, guide the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 22). Pragmatism is an interpretive framework that emphasizes research outcomes over methods. Pragmatist researchers view the problem under study and questions posed about it as crucial components of their research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 26). They appreciate diverse approaches to data collection and analysis, use multiple methods, and emphasize the practical implications of the research.

Creswell and Poth outline the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological beliefs of Pragmatism as “reality is what is useful, is practical, and works; reality is known through using many tools of research that reflect both deductive (objective) evidence and inductive (subjective) evidence; values are discussed because of the way that knowledge reflects both the researchers’ and the participants’ views; the research process involves both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis” (2018, pp. 34-35).

I decided to use phenomenology along with the ideas from actor-network theory because both focus on understanding human actions and language in relation to specific situations or contexts (Schwandt, 2015, p. 206). Higher education administration is a suitable subject to study in phenomenology because it is “not a single unified philosophical standpoint” (Schwandt, 2015,

p. 233). Higher education administration has multiple realities that are complex and intertwined. Thus, studying the functional area of university outreach as a frame of reference for human action and language makes exploring the messaging and communication structure accessible. Higher education administration is a lifeworld specific to university outreach personnel, while university outreach is a social world specific to higher education administration. University outreach personnel are the human action that provide life to higher education administration, which creates a social order of its knowledge base as university outreach for public consumption.

This study emphasizes describing the actions taken by higher education administration to communicate university outreach, rather than focusing on the researcher's interpretations. The subjective nature of outreach efforts may be better understood with phenomenology's ability to provide an in-depth investigation of the experiences of university outreach personnel. What is more, actor-network theory provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play by illuminating the complex web of relationships and interactions among the chosen informants engaged in administering university outreach.

Research Question

The interpretive framework of pragmatism is "to find solutions to real world problems" (Creswell & Poth, p. 33). It aligns with my research values that call for an "appreciation of diverse approaches to collecting and analyzing data and the contexts in which research takes place" (p. 33). The most appropriate method for addressing this study's research question is phenomenology with an actor-network theory attitude. My goal is to address the problem higher education administration has in recognizing and rewarding its university outreach personnel for their contributions or engagement with university outreach by bringing awareness to how it frames communication of the functional area.

The central question of this study is, ‘How does higher education administration describe university outreach?’ This question was selected because comprehending how higher education administration portrays university outreach is crucial for developing successful communication strategies that promote and acknowledge the involvement of faculty in outreach endeavors.

The use of the word ‘how’ indicates an exploration of the diverse methods of communicating university outreach, highlighting the complexity and depth of the communication processes involved. Higher education administration views university outreach as a fundamental aspect essential for university outreach personnel, which is key to creating social structures and fostering connections within the community. The term ‘describe’ refers to the definition and structure of university outreach activities.

The Researcher. During this study, I am graduate research assistant, enrolled in a higher education doctoral program, of a research-intensive, land-grant higher education institution where my job responsibilities are to research public relations in university outreach. I assume the role of observer-participant, bringing in my extensive experience in different areas of higher education over the past decade. Being involved in the daily operations of higher education administration provides me a unique perspective on the various challenges and opportunities related to recruitment, retention, and reputation management. I am constantly considering how outreach and service initiatives exert influence on student recruitment, retention, and the overall reputation of the institution. This awareness helps guide my work as a scholar-practitioner in public relations and studying higher education policy. While the diverse experiences I have had in enrollment management and student affairs add depth and authenticity to the way the study is approached and executed.

My background allows an examination of the interactions between faculty, staff, and students through critical reflection on my role in supporting how the higher education environment frames itself using university outreach. I identify as an Indigenous American cisgender, heterosexual woman from underserved and marginalized communities in the Deep South, where the scarcity of socioeconomic resources advanced a poverty mindset. I hold a bachelor's degree in telecommunications (media business and marketing focus) and a master's degree in education (student affairs in higher education focus) from research-intensive universities in the Midwest.

The training I have received in marketing and the administration of higher education frames my perspective on the design of this study and the types of information I have been trained to consider relevant to contributing to the field. As the researcher, author, and analyst for this study, I was reflexive by recognizing my biases, adding to my assumptions, and points of view influenced by my background that might affect the research process and results.

Research Design

The research design emphasizes descriptions rather than interpretations because this study is an exploration of how university outreach is networked as a functional area by higher education administration. The use of phenomenology to analyze the text and documents on university websites and the responses from university outreach personnel highlights the specific area of university outreach within higher education administration. Actor-network theory shows how higher education administration describes and organizes experiences related to university outreach, helping faculty keep track of their outreach activities and research.

I attempt to prioritize the importance of these viewpoints in guiding outreach efforts and enhancing university outreach personnel' access to growth in their careers. I invite the reader on an exploratory journey by illustrating the textual expressions displayed by higher education administration's university outreach. The path involves giving an account on what outreach means and outlining the published materials representing university outreach. There is no quantitative analysis of data because this study is exploratory, open-ended, and creates themes directly from the qualitative data.

Definition of Informants. Instead of using the terms participant, respondent, or the observed as identifiers of the individuals in this study, informant is suitable. 'They act as a fieldwork assistant, debriefer, and guide' providing information on what I cannot experience. What is more, they 'are knowledgeable insiders and assist in gaining and maintaining access to understanding university outreach from their perspective. (Schwandt, 2015, p. 154).

Auburn University (AU), University of Georgia (UGA), and Mississippi State University (MSU) informed the direction of this study on how university outreach is structured to communicate with campus stakeholders. These institutions share a few commonalities in how they engage and serve their local communities through research, scholarship, and teaching.

Selection. This study began with a document analysis as its primary data collection. Auburn University Division of University Outreach (University Outreach), University of Georgia's Public Service and Outreach (PSO), and Mississippi State University Center for Community-Engaged Learning (CCEL).

The criteria for selection included participation, involvement, membership, or designation with the following: Engagement Scholarship Consortium, Association of Public & Land-Grant

Universities, Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement Classified Campuses 2020, and Great Value Colleges 30 Universities Excelling at Community Outreach, located in the Deep South. The institutions considered for selection were University Outreach at Auburn University, Public Service and Outreach at University of Georgia, Center for Public Service at Tulane University, Center for Community-Engaged Learning at Mississippi State University, and Division of Community Engagement, Belonging, and Access at Clemson University.

Through purposive sampling, I selected universities with designated centers or departments for outreach these higher education institutions are listed as research-intensive institutions that have profound influence on the landscape of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices (DEI Recruitment & Hiring, n.d.). Additionally, they have been recognized by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching ‘for their exceptional commitment to community engagement, and their work to transform knowledge into meaningful action. They exemplify the true spirit of...the power of serving the public good’ (Hamilton, 2024).

4 of 5 institutions are APLU members. 2 of 5 are members of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium. Within the last 10 years, all have participated in Carnegie Classification; only 3 participated in 2020. 4 of 5 were designated as a land-grant institution with the Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities. 3 of 5 were listed as a great value college excelling at community outreach. They’re all located in the Deep South.

The study’s time constraints led to the selection of only 3 schools based on Carnegie Classification and APLU Membership criteria. Each institution was selected based on their designation and membership, with the Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities as land-

grant institutions by their respective state legislature and involvement Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement Classified Campuses 2020.

Sampling logic. When referring to the conceptual map of university outreach’s communication environment, the intent is to create “a working picture of the temporal, ritual, and routine features of the persons, organizations, or social actions under study (Denzin, 1989 as cited in Schwandt, p. 278). The map guided selection of the specific interactions studied within the communication environment.

Advertising. There was no advertising to informants, as I adopted an approach from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) described as the method I took as taking advantage of unexpected leads or opportunistic sampling (as cited in Crawford, 2020, p. 89). It was opportunistic sampling because it is an explorative study, so was open to interviewing university outreach personnel who have expertise in coordinating communication strategies for their institution. Their email addresses were found on the university contact page. For an example of a sample email message to executive leadership, see Appendix 4.

Setting. I conducted this study remotely, utilizing a computer to access websites, conduct interviews, and carry out all aspects of research. The setting for data collection and analysis is virtual, using digital platforms to conduct document and thematic analysis. The websites of the higher education institutions host the text expressions and are the setting for collecting those written materials. The institutions chosen are research-intensive universities and physically located in the Deep South of the United States.

Data Sources

The interplay between document analysis and interviewing is particularly fruitful. Document analysis can provide background information and identify key areas or materials related to university outreach. Combining these data types enriches the overall analysis and interpretation to provide a more comprehensive understanding and contextualize information found in the documents, and vice versa.

Documents. The aim was to choose texts, videos, images, and documents that had the capacity to function as a call-to-action for documenting faculty engagement and outreach scholarship. I expected to come across institutional structures, rules, and messaging frameworks that influenced outreach activities, which had a significant role in guiding and communicating goals, strategies, and expectations of outreach efforts. Because of time constraints for this study, the focus quickly turned to only focus on texts and documents that served as formal protocols, regulations, and communication structures that governed outreach activities and recognition of faculty outreach and engagement.

My background working in higher education and marketing communications has trained my perspective to expect finding the following:

- ✓ Mission and vision statements outlining the primary goals and aspirations of the institution's outreach efforts. These provide a complete framework to guide the development and implementation of outreach campaigns.
- ✓ Strategic plans outlining long-term goals and objectives for expanding institutional reach. These plans function as a blueprint for prioritizing and allocating resources to support outreach efforts.

- ✓ Policy papers and guidelines documents designed to provide a clear and detailed overview of the official rules and expected standards related to outreach initiatives. They may provide standards for assessing the effectiveness of outreach efforts, provide instructions for forming community partnerships, explain protocols for reporting and evaluating outcomes, and address ethical issues.
- ✓ Communication and branding standards explicit standards about the way outreach initiatives should be conveyed to both internal and external stakeholders. Guarantee uniformity in communication, branding, and the representation of the institution's dedication to community involvement.
- ✓ Evaluation frameworks that may have been developed to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of outreach programs.

Interviews. To supplement the aforementioned, I chose to include interviews as a data source, and designed questions that directly explored the link between recognition of outreach efforts and faculty motivation and engagement. Both instances of well-communicated and recognized outreach, as well as instances of inadequate recognition, are explored. Informants were encouraged to express their views on whether outreach is appropriately acknowledged and incentivized for faculty career progression, with aim to illuminate the institutional focus on outreach in relation to professional development. Additionally, they were requested to provide instances of messaging or communication methods that successfully emphasized to faculty the advantages of outreach engagement and scholarship. Responses from the interview questions point out how university outreach personnel define outreach and how their personal values intersect with institutional goals in driving faculty engagement and outreach scholarship. The

questions are designed to identify methods used to communicate outreach to faculty and the messaging strategies that resonate most effectively.

The decision to employ interviewing as a complementary method to document analysis is rooted in the distinct contributions each method brings to the research. Document analysis examining various forms of text or visual materials, a source of qualitative data (VanderStoep & Johnston, 2009; Creswell, 2014). The sources for this study include published materials representing university outreach and website displays. While document analysis can reveal what is presented or formally stated, it may not fully capture the underlying perspective, or subjective experiences of the individuals involved in creating and enacting these materials (Creswell, 2014). This is where interviewing becomes indispensable. Engaging with the informants, I was able to gain access to their personal accounts, insights, and interpretations that allowed me to understand university outreach not just as represented in documents but as a lived experience from the perspective of those directly involved.

In summary, the distinct capacities of each method in addressing the research questions fundamentally justify the choice to utilize interviews alongside document analysis. Document analysis provides valuable material representations of university outreach, while interview provides access to the lived experiences and meaning articulated by the key personnel involved (Seidman, 2019). This combined qualitative approach aligns with the exploratory aims of the study, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from multiple data sources (Creswell, 2014). The adaption of remote data collection via PDF documents is a pragmatic response to logistical considerations, while still upholding the core intent of gathering, rich qualitative data from the selected informants (Seidman, 2019).

Data Collection Methods

Document Analysis. Document analysis is the process of studying documents like policy papers, reports, guidelines, and communication materials to get insights and knowledge of a certain subject or phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Schwandt, p. 77; Miles et al., 2014; Guest et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 179). Document analysis examines the context, language, and rhetoric in documents to provide historical or textual evidence that supports study conclusions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 179; Miles et al., 2014; Creswell, 2014). By starting with a document analysis to look at how a university defines outreach, Merriam and Tisdell suggest “[i]f at all possible, written documents should be copied and artifacts photographed or videotaped” (p. 179).

Examining documents requires meticulous reading, coding, and analysis of the material, which may be accomplished through thematic or coding analysis (Burkholder et al., 2020). Creswell’s (2014) approach enables qualitative study of documents through identification of themes, patterns, and significant ideas. This strategy involves examining official websites, departmental papers, and other relevant sources to gather information and recognize patterns, trends, and communication strategies (Creswell, 2014). These representations of university outreach as text expressions of situations, events, and activities balance capturing the essence of university outreach from a qualitative lens.

Document Analysis Method. First, I started the screen record feature on my university-sponsored Zoom to record the exploration of each university’s website for publicly accessible text expressions defining what university outreach means at the institution, including policies, handbooks, or other campus specific materials. Primarily looking for

- ✓ a faculty, staff, or student handbook outlining outreach activities for promotion.
- ✓ a repository, website, or archive that displays, demonstrates, or features activities and initiatives sponsored by the institution for or with faculty, staff, or students.
- ✓ mission, vision, and values that help understand how the university prioritizes the way it communicates outreach initiatives by university outreach personnel.

In the absence of such written material, the focus shifted to identifying materials that emphasized reward and recognition for university faculty outreach scholarship or engagement, offering valuable insights into the acknowledgement of faculty contributions to service.

I gathered documents from August 2024 until March 2025 exploring the webpages between 4-6 hours until I have exhausted all accessible webpages. I repeated the following process for each university website:

- ✓ Explored the university outreach websites for specific departments, institutes, offices, or units explicitly stated for their management or administration of outreach.
- ✓ Clicked through each page and every link in sections explicitly dedicated to outreach activities, community involvement, public service, or faculty engagement.
- ✓ Searched for downloadable papers related to outreach, such as policy documents, guidelines, reports, strategic plans, and communication materials, typically accessible in PDF or digital formats.
- ✓ Made a record of significant terminology and phrases that are often associated with outreach, such as community partnerships, civic engagement, experiential learning, volunteerism, and social impact. Used these keywords to enhanced the search and identify specific documents.

- ✓ Saved each video as a file in a folder labeled with each university name. After I reviewed the video, I screenshot an image of each webpage and saved it in a folder titled: mission, vision, or promotion.
- ✓ Uploaded screenshots to Atlas.ti to point out recurring patterns, themes, and concepts consistently seen in connection with university outreach.
- ✓ Atlas.ti searched for patterns and similarities, identified key passages and segments to suggest codes for that could be used as themes.
- ✓ Identify, highlight, and underline key passages, remarks, statements, or segments that discussed the purpose, goals, and strategies of outreach efforts.
 - Note any specific concepts or structures stated.

Interviews. Within the spectrum of qualitative data collection tools, interviewing is a prominent and powerful method (VanderStoep & Johnston, 2009). While various means exist to approach the experience of people in contemporary organizations, such as examining documents, observation, or surveys, interviewing offers a unique and often necessary avenue of inquiry when the goal is to understand the meaning people involved in the social institution, like higher education, make of their experiences (Seidman, 2019). It provides access to understanding their action and putting behavior in context, which is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Seidman, 2019).

Interview Method. After I completed exploring each university's website and gathering data, I planned to interview 5 informants once between August 2024 and October 2024, with a follow-up interview scheduled to verify transcriptions and member-check between December 2024 and February 2025. I wanted to gather firsthand accounts and individual experiences to complement the document analysis. I aimed to use university-sponsored Zoom to record video

and audio along with using Microsoft Word's transcription services to transcribe the audio. I anticipated using the script from the transcription to thoroughly review for significant quotes, statements, and extract any themes to support a thorough qualitative exploration of informants' experiences, viewpoints, and motives about working within university outreach.

There were three university outreach personnel across these institutions respond to the invitation to share their experience about decisions on how university outreach is displayed on their websites. They declined the invitation to interview on Zoom but shared their responses to the interview questions in a pdf document sent through university-sponsored email.

The specific method of data collection involving informants sharing responses to interview questions via a PDF document sent through email represents an adaptation of traditional interviewing. While in-person contact visits for making initial contact are often preferred for building the interviewing relationship, there is acknowledgement that constraints such as distance, time, or participant preference may necessitate remote interviewing via telephone, email, or video conference (Seidman, 2019). Email has become a part of the contact process, although initial contact can yield ambiguous results (Seidman, 2019). Conducting interviews through technology or email requires conscious effort to convey consideration and respect to counter the potential for formality hindering rapport (Seidman, 2019). This adapted approach still serves the primary purpose of collecting qualitative data on the informants' experiences and perspectives, even though it deviates from the typical face-to-face in-depth interview and would not be accessible solely through document analysis.

Data Analysis

In typical qualitative analysis there is a process by condensing and categorizing each statement, passage, or quote with a label or code that reflects the main theme or topic it represents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 223). “Coding is a procedure that disaggregates the data, breaks it down into manageable segments, and identifies or names those segments” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 30). Using “[a] grounded, a posteriori, inductive, context-sensitive scheme” involves working “with the actual language of respondents to generate the codes or categories” and working “back and forth between the data segments and the codes or categories to refine the meaning of categories as they proceed through the data” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 30).

Following coding, computer-assisted data analysis was employed to “facilitate the management of large volumes of data and enable... [location, labeling (categorization or coding)], cross-reference, and [compilation of] various combinations of segments of [the] textual data (Schwandt, 2015, p. 34). Creswell and Poth advise on using computers to assist with data analysis: “Software is only a tool to help with some of the mechanical and management aspects of analysis, so [,] the hard analytic thinking must be done by the researcher’s own internal hard drive!” (p. 208). This study employs computer-assisted data analysis (CAQDAS) because of the following advantages:

“Provides an organized storage file system for ease of retrieval; helps locate material with ease for the purposes of sorting; encourages a researcher to look closely at the data; produces visual representations for codes and themes; links memos with codes, themes, or documents for ease of reviewing; enables collaborative analysis and sharing among team members” (Creswell & Poth, p. 207; Merriam & Tisdell, p. 224).

Additional advantages of using CAQDAS include “enhancing what Seale (2008, p. 236) calls the rigor of the study” (as cited by Merriam & Tisdell, p. 225) and enables the researcher to visualize the relationship among codes and themes through the concept mapping feature (Creswell, 2013, p. 202 as cited by Merriam & Tisdell, p. 225).

ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software program, assisted in the “organization of text, graphic, and visual data files” (Creswell & Poth, p. 212) and detailed development of clusters of meaning into themes for analysis. It speeds up the analysis process, especially when assigning a code label and develops a printout of the text or image segment for the code. These are a significant help for implementing Creswell and Poth’s “template [see Appendix B] for coding a phenomenological study,” by placing “codes for epoche or bracketing, significant statements, meaning units, and textural and structural descriptions (which both might be written as memos)” (p. 216).

Additionally, “ATLAS.ti support[ed] the construction of complex networks . . . and structures in the developing category scheme” (Kelle, 2004, p. 483 as cited by Merriam & Tisdell, p. 223). “It is the researcher, not the computer program, who assigns codes (or names categories), and it is the researcher who determines which units of data go with the codes (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 223). Therefore, I chose to categorize interview responses and text expressions into themes labeled mission, vision, and promotion. This process is a more appropriate approach to yielding “either a fully labeled (coded) set of data that can be retrieved and manipulated for further analysis or new data documents (e.g., analytical memos, graphic displays) used in further analysis” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 30).

Document and interview response analysis. I used Atlas.ti to sift through interview responses and document analyses in search of key phrases that explain how universities strategically craft their outreach messaging to achieve specific goals and outcomes, such as increasing community engagement, fostering partnerships, and enhancing the institution's reputation, focusing on describing these communication strategies. I created a textural description reflecting three essential themes and then wrote a structural description of the university outreach communication in relation to higher education administration.

The adaptation to receiving interview responses via PDF document means the data is already in a text format, albeit one that differed from a transcript of a verbal exchange. This text still represents the informants' words and perspectives, serving the purpose of providing access to their lived experiences and the meanings they impart to their involvement in university outreach.

Organizing the data for analysis: For interviews, this often involves transcription, which converts audio recordings into written text (Seidman, 2019). In this study's adapted interview method, the data is already in PDF text format, simplifying this step compared to transcribing audio. Managing this text involved sorting and arranging it, ensuring it is securely stored and traceable to the original source (Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). The use of Atlas.ti supported in managing and organizing the extensive files that the documents and interview data generated (Seidman, 2019).

Initial reading and immersion: before segmenting the data through coding, it was important to engage with the text as a whole to gain a comprehensive understanding (Creswell, 2014; Seidman, 2019). This involved reading through interview responses and documents

multiple times to become thoroughly familiar with both accounts and perspectives (Seidman, 2019). Immersion in the data was fundamental for making sense of the qualitative material (Seidman, 2019).

Coding the data: Coding is a foundational technique in qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). It involved segmenting the text, taking it apart as data, and labeling these segments with codes (Creswell, 2014; Seidman, 2019). Codes are tags or labels that categorize chunks of text based on what they represent (Miles et al., 2014). I used Atlas.ti to facilitate coding, and it helped to identify recurring ideas, concepts, and experiences within the data. I chose what to code and how it aligns with the goals of this study (Seidman, 2019).

Developing themes and descriptions: following initial coding, I searched for patterns, connections, and salient material both within individual interview responses and across the responses of all informants (Seidman, 2019).. The aim was to develop descriptions that summarized the key experiences, viewpoints, and motives revealed in the data.

I categorized themes using the secondary research questions:

- 1) What are the key channels and methods used by university outreach personnel to communicate outreach for faculty?
 - a. I assumed the key channels used to communicate outreach initiatives for university outreach personnel are institutional email, social media, and the university website, coordinated and operated by a central marketing or communication office. Institutional and university policies that are time-sensitive or department-specific limit the methods used to communicate outreach initiatives for university outreach personnel.

2) In what ways does higher education administration use their websites to pass along information about the way their faculty represent university outreach?

a. University outreach becomes a primary communication structure when it contributes to the achievement of an institutional strategic goal, which in turn supports the university's accreditation or economic advancement. Print and digital marketing materials, specifically printed or digital magazines, interactive webpages, and newsletters, are methods to present university outreach.

In Chapter 4, I report and present the core aspects of university outreach messaging, focusing on key themes and communication strategies, to provide a detailed overview of the communication structure. I provide the themes from both interview responses and document analyses as a basis for understanding university outreach communication structures. Also, I provide a reflective comparison of findings aligning with actor-network theory and attempt to construct meaning of the findings.

Transferability Limitations. This study is an attempt to provide sufficient detail on an approach to understanding how framing a functional area in higher education administration influences the decisions made by university outreach personnel to coordinate and execute its operations. To address transferability limitations, I triangulated data collection using document analysis and interviews. Furthermore, I provided detailed and rich descriptions on the research context, informants, and findings to help better understand the specific context where the research was conducted so that judgments about the applicability of the findings may be considered for application in another context.

The sample size may not accurately reflect the richness and variability of wider outreach activities, limiting the ability to apply the results to broader groups or situations. The distinct features and interactions within the research setting may not accurately reflect other settings, which might make it difficult to apply the results to a larger population. It is possible for the reader of this research to take responsibility of engaging “reasonable but modest speculation about whether findings are applicable to other [areas in higher education] with similar circumstances” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 129).

Validity. This research is approached from the fallibilist perspective, “that no claim ever actually reproduces an independently existing meaning, and no claims (no matter how warranted) are ever absolutely certain” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 320). The truth and certainty of this study is provided through triangulation and evidence of document analysis and excerpts of interview transcripts. Reflexivity or “self-reflection” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 257), using Notion as a digital field journal, not only brackets me out of the research, but also points to the fact that I am a part of the setting (participant-observer), context (academic employee in higher education administration), and social phenomenon (studying university outreach public relations). Considering Creswell and Poth’s guidance on validation, the written accounts of this study attempt to “resonate with [the higher education audience], and be compelling, powerful, and convincing” (Creswell & Poth., 2018, p. 258).

Ethical considerations. Regarding data privacy and the use of information from university websites, ensuring all data collection was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines, and that proper consent obtained for using website content was paramount to maintaining the study's integrity. An ethical issue in online research is determining what is public and what is private: “The crucial question is whether the researcher is ethically justified in using

publicly available information as data for a research study. Or, more specifically, in which context is this ethically acceptable or not acceptable?” (Hewson et al., p. 53 as cited by Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The appropriate ethical permission from the university Institutional Review Board was followed thoroughly before data collection and during data analysis.

Prior to participation, informed consent from all informants was obtained, ensuring they were fully aware of their rights, the study’s objectives, and how their data was to be used and preserved. As a researcher, upheld participant confidentiality and anonymity, guaranteeing that any individually identifiable information was adequately protected. I was explicit with information on the steps that may be taken to reduce any injury or discomfort to informants during the collection or analysis of data.

Participant confidentiality and voluntary involvement was be ensured by getting informed permission from all participants. The participant data was anonymized, securely maintained, and accessible only by approved researchers involved in creating the study. Every participant was notified of their freedom to omit questions at any point. The data gathered was analyzed and displayed collectively to safeguard the anonymity of each participant.

Anticipated outcomes of the study. Actor-network theory provides insight into the communication and structure of outreach activities within higher education institutions. Moustaka’s method to phenomenology research provides an understanding of how these activities are documented and shared can contribute to the development of more effective strategies for engaging with external stakeholders, fostering collaboration among university outreach personnel, and promoting the institution's mission of community engagement.

The expected outcomes of this study include a deeper understanding of how outreach is messaged and communicated to university outreach personnel in higher education institutions, as well as insights into potential divergences between the messaging for community impact and career advancement. By addressing potential mismatches in the messaging and evaluation of outreach, this research can lead to clear articulation of university outreach and alternative forms of community engagement in higher education institutions.

Summary. This chapter introduces qualitative research methodology and explains the choice of using a qualitative design for exploration. It focuses on exploring how university outreach personnel engage with outreach programs and how positioning outreach as a growth activity impacts strategic direction, organizational values, and individual motivations. The central research question is how higher education administration describes university outreach. The researcher adopts the role of an observer-participant and conducts document analysis and interviews to gather data. The data was analyzed combining document and interview analysis with the help of Atlas.ti software to code and suggest themes from the data. Ethical considerations were followed and maintained, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring participant confidentiality.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Introduction. University outreach extends the legacy of land-grant institutions in higher education. The Morrill Act of 1872 mandates land-grant institutions to use their resources across diverse fields with the aim of addressing pressing local, state, regional, and international issues (Morrill Act, 1862, 2022). As a function of higher education administration, university outreach is the vehicle promoting reciprocity and partnership for exchanges of knowledge and pursuing a legacy of common good. Public service is not an ancillary activity, “now more than ever, outreach is a way to prove the benefit of higher education to society in a real and tangible way” (University of Georgia, personal communication, March 2025). It is a fundamental aspect of the university’s purpose, reflecting a commitment to serve the broader community and contribute to the public good.

Overview. As an attempt to further categorize university outreach as a functional area of higher education administration, this study explores how university outreach is structured as a communication method for faculty to demonstrate their outreach and engagement scholarship for tenure and promotion. The research focuses on three institutions in the Deep South: Auburn University (AU), the University of Georgia (UGA), and Mississippi State University (MSU). These institutions were selected based on their engagement with key higher education organizations and classifications, such as the Engagement Scholarship Consortium, the Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities (APLU), the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement Classified Campuses 2020, and recognition by Great Value Colleges for community outreach.

The study begins with document analysis of publicly available webpages and documents, that served as the primary method of data collection. Interviews with each institution’s outreach

leadership complemented document analysis. Each institution’s designated outreach department, AU Division of University Outreach, the UGA Public Service and Outreach (PSO), and the MSU Center for Community-Engaged Learning (CCEL), were included based on their designation and involvement with the APLU and the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement in 2020.

University	State	Carnegie Classification	Engagement Scholarship Consortium	Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities	Type of Data Collected
Auburn University	AL	2020	Member	Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ University Outreach ✓ Webpages ✓ Documents ✓ Publications ✓ Interview
University of Georgia	GA	2020	Member	Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ PSO Webpages ✓ Publications ✓ Documents ✓ Interview
Mississippi State University	MS	2020	Not a member	Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ CCEL webpages ✓ Documents ✓ Interview

Research Questions. With the sample noted above, the following research questions were addressed:

- ✓ How does higher education administration describe university outreach?
- ✓ What are the key channels and methods used by university outreach personnel to communicate outreach for faculty?

Overview of Document Analysis Data Sources

University Name	Designated Outreach Department/ Unit	Type of Data Reviewed (Location)	Scope
Auburn University (AU)	Division of University Outreach	Official Website Content (auburn.edu/outreach/about.htm, auburn.edu/outreach/resources.htm)	Mission/Vision statements, policy documents, program descriptions, faculty directories, news articles, publications (e.g., <i>Beyond Auburn</i> magazine)
University of Georgia (UGA)	Public Service and Outreach (PSO)	Official Website Content (outreach.uga.edu/about/, outreach.uga.edu/resources/promotions/)	Mission/Vision statements, historical overview, promotion guidelines (esp. Note 3), program unit descriptions, news/awards (Walter Barnard Hill Award)
Mississippi State University (MSU)	Center for Community-Engaged Learning (CCEL)	Official Website Content (ccel.msstate.edu/about/mission/)	Mission/History, program descriptions, staff information, award categories (Excellence in Community Engagement Awards), mini-grant information

Themes Overview. To differentiate and understand the textual data gathered, the findings are organized and interpreted through three overarching thematic descriptions: Mission, Vision, and Promotion. The ‘mission’ theme encompasses mission statements, institutional definitions of outreach, and historical context. Conceptually, informed by etymology, ‘mission’

is understood as ‘an organized effort for the spread of religion or enlightenment of a community.’ The ‘Vision’ theme focuses on strategic plans, handbooks, and policies related to outreach. It’s etymological grounding defines ‘vision’ as ‘the act of seeing, sight, thing seen.’ Promotion as a theme looks into how outreach is recognized and communicated through avenues such as awards, news, publications, and funding opportunities. From an etymological perspective, ‘promotion’ includes advertising or publicity, help, support, encouragement, and assistance.

- ✓ Mission — mission statements, definitions, history
- ✓ Vision — Strategic plans, handbooks, policies
- ✓ Promotion — awards, news, publications, funding opportunities

The findings in these themes include summaries of key points from interviews, extracting specific facts from webpages, clarifying complex topics, and pointing out specific information within the source documents about university outreach.

Within these themes, I focus on textual data regarding awards and news for promotion; mission statements, definitions, and institution history for mission; and handbooks and policies for vision. Incorporating the etymology of mission, vision, and promotion into the themes helped to create a structure for the interpretation of data. In this, I define the mission theme is defined as ‘an organized effort for the spread of religion or for enlightenment of a community’ (Mission - Etymology, Origin & Meaning, 2025). Vision is “the act of seeing, sight, thing seen” (Vision - Etymology, Origin & Meaning, 2025). Promotion as theme means advertising or publicity, help, support, encouragement, assistance (Promotion - Etymology, Origin & Meaning, 2025).

Results: How Higher Education Administration Describes University Outreach

University administration is the key to how outreach is structured, and goals are defined. Outreach is influenced by a mix of policies (represented by centers and committees), historical background (such as land-grant status), and outside acknowledgments (like Carnegie Classification), all of which are often linked to the institution's mission (How Mississippi State University Defines Community-Engaged Learning, 2025; "Outreach at Auburn," 2025a; "History - UGA," 2024).

Higher education administration describes university outreach as an endeavor directed through service-oriented collaborations and engagement-focused communities, like MSU's Center for Community-Engaged Learning. How university outreach is framed depends on external recognition and foundational mandates that emphasize public service and the integration of service and engagement into the university's mission and culture. Higher education institutions, especially land-grant universities like Auburn and UGA, describe university outreach beyond teaching and research to meet the needs of their communities. Outreach therefore has a reciprocal nature that benefits both the university and the community to improve quality of life and prosperity through partnerships that address community needs and societal issues.

Theme 1: Mission

A foundational element from the data is the land-grant mission that is a key driver and formalization of Auburn and UGA's mandate for outreach and service ("History - UGA," 2024; "Outreach at Auburn," 2025). UGA and MSU share historical roots in applying university knowledge through the creation of core outreach programs that extend their resources to address societal needs.

Common elements of outreach and engagement across these institutions include:

Outreach and engagement involve the entire university community: Each university actively supports and involves faculty, staff, and students in connecting classroom instruction and research to public issues through service-learning courses and community-based projects.

Partnerships addressing critical issues and improving quality of life: Focusing beyond traditional degree programs, outreach and service is framed within the context of collaborative efforts that often includes professional development, lifelong learning, youth programs, and job training (“Outreach at Auburn,” 2025; “History - UGA,” 2024; “About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025; (“Mission Statement - UGA,” 2023).

Emphasis on service to its state: UGA develops leaders, creates jobs, and addresses critical challenges by serving every county in Georgia (“About Public Service - UGA,” 2024)). MSU’s CCEL extends “the MSU tradition of instilling the ideals of citizenship and service” throughout the state of Mississippi (“About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025). More exclusively, Auburn University’s outreach and engagement mission has century-long established partnerships with communities, businesses, schools, and government in Alabama (“Outreach at Auburn,” 2025).

Another key element of how higher education administration communicates their outreach efforts is through their designated outreach offices and departments missions. These offices oversee institutes, centers, and offices where students, faculty, and staff actively engage with the mission of outreach.

Then there are the elements of the written definition of the mission and the activities of outreach. The history and mission statements of universities provide narratives that frame the

direction of outreach. Academic programs, public service, scholarship, community involvement, technical and strategic support, and educational opportunities are the main tenets of university outreach (AU Competitive Outreach Scholarship Grants, 2025). Service-learning and community-based projects impact and benefit economic development, community improvement, student enrichment, and institutional recognition so that university outreach is an essential endeavor (“PSO Student Scholars,” 2025). The data don’t just provide definitions about activities of outreach; they also describe the practical work undertaken by these offices to fulfill their missions.

Auburn’s core mission for university outreach is seen as a special legacy that serves the community and is a “mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge that promotes the common good” (“Outreach at Auburn,” 2025). The underserved areas in the State of Alabama are the target audiences that Auburn University Outreach aims to enhance with access to educational resources while ensuring faculty, staff, and students have enriching experiences in their public service and community engagement efforts. Auburn’s University Outreach describes its activities through the Instruct, Assist, Service framework, mentioning providing educational opportunities for all ages, offering technical and strategic assistance to various entities, and promoting public service through activities and events.

Similarly, UGA has viewed public service as one of its “fundamental missions” since its establishment in 1785 (“History - UGA,” 2024). As a land-grant institution since 1872, UGA has a formal mandate to utilize its personnel and resources for outreach programs (“History - UGA,” 2024). UGA’s PSO encompasses a wide range of activities carried out by its various units, from statewide extension programs in diverse fields, governmental training, lifelong learning, supporting entrepreneurs, and providing marine education to teaming with communities on

economic development and strategic planning through the Archway Partnership and enrolling students in service learning.

Mississippi State University (MSU) focuses on “community-engaged learning” and “community engagement” (“About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025). Their Carnegie designation called attention to the institution’s dedication to community involvement that fuses mission, culture, leadership, resources, and practices. MSU’s CCEL works with faculty, students, extension members, and community partners, providing training, supporting scholarship production and publication, obtaining support for methodologies, and highlighting engagement efforts.

University of Georgia (UGA)

The University of Georgia is a leader in public service traditions that date back to 1785 and has sustained momentum as a land-grant institution since 1872. Since its designation as a land-grant institution, UGA has a rich history with a various programs established, and initiatives introduced by its Public Service and Outreach (PSO) and executed by centers, offices, and units that focus on economic development and leadership with faculty expertise applied to benefit Georgia’s economy. PSO relies on “[t]he mission of the University of Georgia’s Outreach programs...to improve people’s lives by helping create jobs and prosperity, developing leaders, and addressing the state’s most critical issues” (“Mission Statement - UGA,” 2023).

In an interview with the senior director of marketing and communications for PSO, she described university outreach as a critical component of the institution’s mission and goals, emphasizing its role in connecting the university with the community while demonstrating the tangible benefits of higher education to society. Some key points from the interview include:

✓ Engagement and Service Mission: As a way to engage students in service and community projects, university outreach frames opportunities for students to further their own goals. For example, a program that involved undergraduates in public health initiatives led to community changes, such as the implementation of a responder model of policing, which led to cost savings and improved treatment options for previously incarcerated individuals.

✓ Communication and recognition: PSO acknowledges an imbalance in the value of outreach being communicated or having the same level of attention as research and student success. This results in the marketing and communications team's responsibility for sharing outreach stories and impact of initiatives being a crucial piece to outreach.

✓ Support and resources: The senior director for marketing and communications has observed, through daily operations, the need for more resources for communication efforts, recognizing outreach in tenure and promotion processes, and offering financial support to faculty involved in these activities. To further elevate the profile of outreach work, it requires an institutional commitment.

✓ Impact on Society: Outreach is the avenue university's use to demonstrate its value to society so that higher education institutions responsibly engage with and positively impact their communities.

PSO commits to marshaling its expertise to address critical state needs and improve quality of life, partnering with various organizations, engaging faculty and students in addressing public issues, and maximizing state resources for tangible short-and long-term prosperity ("Mission Statement - UGA," 2023; "About Public Service - UGA," 2024)). The office seeks to

enhance the lives of future generations of Georgians. The PSO scholarship at UGA includes applied research, service-based institution and training, program and project management consultation, and technical assistance. A program is considered PSO (“Walter Barnard Hill Award - UGA,” 2024) if it utilizes faculty expertise, directly applies knowledge to significant societal needs, serves the public good, generates new knowledge, and aligns with a unit’s mission. Their outreach programs have diversified over time to adapt to economic, social, and cultural changes (“History - UGA,” 2024).

UGA’s Public Service and Outreach (PSO) is stated to be to “improve people’s lives by helping create jobs and prosperity, developing leaders and addressing the state’s most critical issues” (“Mission Statement - UGA,” 2023). This objective is pursued through various units and activities, as evidenced by the list of eight specific PSO units mentioned on their website, such as the “Archway Partnership,” “Carl Vinson Institute of Government,” and “Small Business Development Center.” This enumeration of specific operational units provides tangible evidence of how UGA structures its efforts to fulfill its broad mission statement.

Mississippi State University (MSU)

Taking a different approach to university outreach, Mississippi State University classifies its community engagement and public service efforts in such a unique way that they’ve been recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for their commitment to community engagement. In the absence of a formalized division or unit, the institution helped university members connect both community involvement and public service. The Office of the Provost and MSU Extension collaborated on establishing the Center for the Advancement of Service-Learning Excellence (CASLE) in 2013. Three years later, the Division of Student Affairs joined and renamed the center the Center for Community-Engaged Learning (CCEL). Though it’s no longer housed in

the academic units of the university, its space in the Office of Student Leadership and Community Engagement holds on to MSU's tradition of citizenship and service by continuing collaborations with various stakeholders within MSU Extension and community partners.

The CCEL and the Community Engagement Committee (CEC) support MSU's community engagement strategies through continuous evaluation of research, learning, and service goals by providing training, research development, methodological support, and promoting engagement projects. Based on information from the assistant director of the CCEL (Mississippi State University, personal communication, March 2025), the institution focuses less on outreach that is more about initial communication without necessarily building relationships or assessing outcomes. Rather, they take a more transformative and impactful approach, through engagement, that is viewed as a deeper, sustained collaboration with external partners.

The CCEL's assistant director shared similar sentiments with UGA's PSO around university outreach; however there is a clear distinction from how engagement is framed. Their outreach efforts are viewed as shared knowledge and expertise curated within the academy that emphasizes the importance of collaboration with schools, businesses, and non-profit organizations. Key points of how MSU approaches university outreach include:

- ✓ Framing as engagement: Outreach is framed as a foundational activity that leads to deeper engagement. While outreach shares information, engagement is collaborative and transformative work with external partners.
- ✓ Impact on Society: MSU is recognized in the community as an important partner in sharing academic resources that foster societal impacts.

MSU's broad approach to community engagement integrates meaningful academic courses through experiential learning and critical reflection. Communities are grouped into affiliations of geographic proximity, special interests, or situational similarities at various levels (MSU CCEL, 2025a) that aim to enrich the educational experience and teach civic responsibility (MSU CCEL, 2025b).

MSU's CCEL, while described as taking a slightly different approach emphasizing deeper engagement over initial communication, is stated to be "committed to the MSU tradition of instilling the ideals of citizenship and service". Their mission statement further clarifies this commitment by articulating a purpose "[t]o support the Mississippi State University mission of research, learning, and service by providing training to the university-wide community in community-engaged learning design...highlighting university engagement efforts through assessment, evaluation, publication, and presentation". This directly illustrates the stated objective of supporting the broader university mission through specific outreach activities.

Auburn University

Like UGA, Auburn University's land-grant status regulates its commitment to outreach and engagement. Within the Division of University Outreach, led by the Vice President for University Outreach, the institution's mission is fulfilled through specialized centers and engages with faculty and students within service-learning courses and community projects.

Auburn's University Outreach activities are described through an "Instruct, Assist, Service framework". Their website explicitly notes that Auburn University Outreach "provides educational opportunities for all ages," provides technical and strategic assistance to public and private entities," and "promotes public service through an array of activities".

The division's outreach communications and marketing manager fulfills the land-grant mission by spreading knowledge to help people achieve their educational goals and improve their quality of life across the state. Using a variety of key channels and methods, including social media, e-newsletters, and AUWire, while the outreach website is the primary platform for disseminating information about the ways faculty represent university outreach.

Common channels and methods include:

- The website and AUWire to share stories, showcase and communicate outreach efforts lead by faculty that supports the university outreach mission.
- Social media and publications as a general outreach communications effort to share faculty outreach activities.

Auburn's University Outreach thrives when being involved in collaborations with local, state, and national communities, businesses, and government agencies. These collaborations advance the institution's mission to enhance educational outcomes and quality of life for citizens in Alabama. University Outreach promotes public service through educational opportunities for all ages and uses its institutional expertise to provide technical assistance in various activities. Auburn's longstanding commitment to outreach and engagement is fostered through mutually beneficial knowledge exchange that improves access to university resources and enriches university scholarship. These descriptions offer direct examples of the types of service and assistance Auburn provides as part of its' mission, illustrating the practical application of its framework.

Channels and methods to communicate outreach

Each university's dedicated personnel use a variety of channels and methods to communicate outreach achievements, opportunities, and relevant information. There are five categories [of...], which include (1) calls for award nominations, (2) digital platforms, (3) events and meetings, (4) internal unit communications, and (5) direct outreach and support.

Direct calls for award nominations: Awards like the Walter Barnard Hill Award and the Engaged Scholar Award coordinated by the PSO at UGA, provide campus stakeholders with opportunities to recognize faculty achievement and invite them to participate in formalizing outreach efforts. The way award nominations are communicated varies, but all have specific deadlines, detailed nomination criteria, outlines on benefits for receiving awards, and provide contact information for the award host.

Digital platforms: University outreach personnel often coordinate the use of digital platforms to share information, provide updates, and highlight successful outreach efforts. A website is the central hub for announcements and guidelines, while a newsletter or emails are methods to update interested parties and stakeholders. Supplemental digital platforms, like online submission systems and multimedia, feature access points to submit nominations and showcase photographs or videos of outreach efforts.

Events and Meetings: Direct communication through in-person events, such as meetings and awards ceremonies, provides facilitation points to connect faculty and the communities the institution serves. These events and meetings are coordinated by designated offices and university outreach personnel who support faculty by providing resources, guidance, and funding opportunities, like mini grants. Within designated offices, specific outreach units and unit-level review committees /are communication liaisons who often oversee awards and nominations processes and facilitate discussion about outreach contributions.

While the webpages about history, mission, and vision don't explicitly detail internal newsletters, email communications, or internal portals, the nature of these institutions and the information that is disseminated publicly suggests that faculty likely receive information through a combination of direct collaboration, centralized office communications, and online resources.

Internal Unit Communications: Explicit details on internal communication methods are not found in the texts, yet there is strong implication that the decentralized interconnected nature of resource sharing and strategic alignment at these universities, involving multiple colleges, departments, and specialized units displays a variety of communication flows.

Top-down from leadership setting priorities and strategic direction ("Outreach at Auburn," 2025). Bottom-up from communities, faculty, and staff sharing needs and opportunities. Lateral communication between units, like service-learning office coordination with academic departments, specialized centers collaborating on projects with faculty, or committee-based ("About - Mission & History - CCEL," 2025) for evaluations and strategic planning execution.

Direct Outreach and Support: Auburn hosts or participates in local events that allows for direct engagement with the community, "like the All in All Pink breast cancer and general health awareness event" (Auburn University, personal communication, March 2025). Aligning with the campus's strategic charge of creating catalytic engagement on campus, internal events, such as the Symposium for faculty and the Volunteer Fair to connect students and faculty with community partners, ensures the public benefits from the work of the land, sea, and space grant institution by making its scholarship, research, and programming accessible (Auburn University, personal communication, March 2025).

Given the above channels for communicating outreach, some strategies for outreach:

✓ Collaborative structures and partnerships: CCEL at MSU works directly with faculty, students, and members of MSU Extension, including various levels of personnel like agents, coordinators, department heads, and researchers (“About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025). This model suggests direct communication and collaboration as a key method. Similarly, UGA’s outreach involves faculty and staff across schools and colleges (“History - UGA,” 2024; (“About Public Service - UGA,” 2024)).

✓ Websites and online resources: The data themselves are excerpts from each university’s website. They serve as primary channels for communicating the mission, history, programs, and opportunities related to outreach and engagement to both internal and external stakeholders. Auburn University’s website contains a director of their university outreach offices and faculty contacts (“Outreach at Auburn,” 2025b). MSU CCEL’s website provides information about their mission, history, staff, and what constitutes community-engaged learning (“About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025).

✓ Training and Support: MSU CCEL provides training to the university-wide community in community-engaged learning design (“About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025). This training likely serves as a direct communication method to engage faculty and staff in outreach methodologies and initiatives.

✓ Recognition and Highlighting Efforts: MSU CCEL highlights university engagement efforts through assessment, evaluation, publication, and presentation (“About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025). The report suggests a communication strategy focused on showcasing successful outreach initiatives to encourage further participation and inform stakeholders.

The data for the mission theme describe specific organizational structures, offices or divisions, that are tasked with carrying out the universities' outreach missions, and they detail the types of activities through which these missions are realized. The written definitions of mission and vision statements serve as guiding principles for the work performed by these offices and units. While the specific organizational structures (e.g. UGA's eight PSO units ("About Public Service - UGA," 2024)), MSU's CCEL supported by multiple divisions ("About - Mission & History - CCEL," 2025), Auburn's eight specialized centers under a vice president ("Outreach at Auburn," 2025a) and explicit frameworks (e.g. UGA's mission points, Auburn's Instruct, Assist, Serve, MSU's focus on Community-Engaged Learning and scholarship of engagement) differ, the underlying commitment to broad public service and engagement is consistently emphasized.

Theme 2: Vision

The difference between mission and vision as themes is that the attention moves from describing and defining to presenting the framework of how the mission will be realized. Within the vision, there are policies and guidelines that outline the criteria, procedures, and documentation required for faculty advancement. The core emphasis on merit, sustained performance, collegiality, and contributions to the university's mission, including teaching, research/creative work, outreach, and service, are all related to faculty appointments, promotion, and tenure or outreach and public service.

The vision theme, as differentiated from mission, focuses on strategic plans, handbooks, and policies that frame how the institutional mission will be realized, particularly regarding faculty roles and evaluation. Policies and guidelines serve as codified expressions of a higher education institution's organizational vision, values, and strategic priorities. They translate broad goals into actionable expectations and processes.

In the context of the data, the numerous detailed policies, particularly those related to faculty promotion and tenure, reflect a vision of Auburn University as a comprehensive institution that values and seeks to incentivize contributions across teaching, research or creative work, and outreach. The clear focus on outreach as an important area of assessment, with its own specific criteria, documentation needs, and review methods similar to traditional scholarship, strongly shows a vision of an “engaged institution” that uses its academic knowledge to help outside communities and tackle social issues.

Auburn recognizes outreach as a key activity, encompassing various forms of scholarly engagement, focusing on promotion and tenure within traditional academic roles (Auburn University, 2025a; 2025b). UGA’s guidelines stress demonstrating impact, results, and outcomes of work rather than merely the quantity of products or programs, with dedicated non-tenure track for public service and outreach faculty. Both emphasize the importance of outreach, but UGA’s guidelines provide more details on documenting impact and achievements in public service roles (University of Georgia, 2025).

Each institution’s website provides concrete instances of official policy documents such as Auburn University’s “Promotion and Tenure of Tenure-Track Faculty” and “Continuing Education Unit Policy and Reporting Guidelines for Non-credit Instruction and Outreach Activities,” as well as a “Guide for Faculty Engagement.” The existence of these specific documents, as referenced on their websites, serves as direct evidence of the administrative vision that incorporates outreach into the formal evaluation and recognition structures of the university. The explicit mention of policies for Continuing Education Units (CEUs) indicates a vision that values “non-credit instruction as a valid and consistent way for universities to engage, ensuring quality and giving official recognition to those involved.”

The detailed guidelines for faculty appointments and promotions that include sections on outreach add further context to these findings. UGA's guidelines, in particular, are noted for their emphasis on documenting the "impact, results, and outcomes of work rather than merely the quantity of products or programs." The PSO website explicitly refers to "UGA's guidelines, particularly Note 3 in the Guidelines for Appointment and Promotion document," as providing "a more extensive list of specific examples and types of evidence that demonstrate impact.' While Note 3 itself is not fully reproduced, the description of its content and function within the promotional guidelines serves as explicit evidence of UGA's detailed policy framework designed to evaluate the impact of public service and outreach work. Their website also notes that UGA provides a "Recommendation for Promotion Form" online, another tangible example of a policy-related document made available to operationalize the vision for evaluating faculty contributions.

While both universities require the documentation and evaluation of outreach and public service impact and achievements, UGA's guidelines, particularly Note 3 in the Guidelines for Appointment and Promotion document, the explicit instruction to prioritize impact over quantity in the dossier narrative, provide a more extensive list of specific examples and types of evidence that demonstrate impact. Auburn's guidelines describe what need to be covered in the commentary (including impact) and list types of activities or products, but the level of detail regarding the forms of evidence for impact in the main text is less granular than UGA's dedicated Note 3. UGA's structure detailing requirements for impact, collaboration, and contributions to knowledge or practice, alongside specific dossier sections, creates a highly detailed framework for documenting achievements with their public service faculty track.

To further illustrate, at UGA, Chancellor Walter Barnard Hill is recognized for first articulating the university's modern public service and outreach mission, emphasizing the close

relationship between the university and the state of Georgia to serve the public good. UGA's PSO mission seeks to enhance the lives of future generations of Georgians. The PSO scholarship at UGA includes applied research, service-based institution and training, program and project management consultation, and technical assistance. A program is considered PSO if it utilizes faculty expertise ("Walter Barnard Hill Award - UGA," 2024), directly applies knowledge to significant societal needs, serves the public good, generates new knowledge, and aligns with a unit's mission.

The specific rules for showing impact and scholarship in the PSO promotion guidelines highlight a goal where outreach goes beyond just providing services; it is a serious, results-focused type of applied scholarship that creates new knowledge and clearly helps society. The emphasis on peer review, documentation, and recognition (regional, national, and international leadership) for PSO faculty reflects a vision of elevating outreach professionals as scholars and leaders in their respective fields, integral to the academic community.

Higher education administration uses their websites extensively to pass along information about the way their faculty represent university outreach:

- ✓ Policy documents: websites host official policy documents as the "Promotion and Tenure of Tenure-Track Faculty", "Continuing Education Unit Policy and Reporting Guidelines for Non-Credit Instruction and Outreach Activities," and the "Guide for Faculty Engagement." These documents explicitly define outreach, its role in faculty evaluation, and relevant procedures, and are authored and published by Auburn University on the institution's website. Having specific policies for CEUs shows that there is a belief in the importance of non-credit instruction as a valid and consistent way

for universities to engage, ensuring quality and giving official recognition to those involved.

✓ Guidelines and procedures: Detailed guidelines for faculty appointments and promotions, specifically including a section on outreach, are made available online. These often include step-by-step procedures, required documentation, and timelines (i.e., UGA PSO 2025-26 Promotions Calendar).

✓ Support information and resources for faculty: contact information for offices that provide resources to faculty engaged in outreach (i.e., Office of the Vice President for University Outreach or Office for Faculty Engagement), such as grant opportunities and support services for program development (the Office of Professional and Continuing Education).

✓ Clarifying definitions and frameworks: clear definitions of key terms such as ‘outreach scholarship, service-learning, and civic engagement to help faculty understand the university’s internal conceptualization of university outreach. They might also present frameworks that illustrate the relationships among different forms of scholarly contributions, including outreach (Auburn University, 2000; Flynt et al., 2007).

✓ Examples and templates: Auburn University provides examples of successful outreach portfolios (“Examples of Outreach Portfolios,” 2025) and templates for reporting (i.e., the sample CEU request form) to guide faculty in documenting their outreach work effectively (University Outreach, 1994). UGA provides a “Recommendation for Promotion Form” online (University of Georgia, 2025; “Promotions - UGA,” 2025).

✓ News and announcements: UGA’s website, for instance, notes “Major Changes to Appointments & Promotion Guidelines” and provides information about promotion workshops (“Major Changes to Appointments & Promotion Guidelines,” 2024; “Promotions - UGA,” 2025).

The policies regarding collaboration suggest a vision where working with others, both internal and external, is a key mechanism to enhance the scope and impact of outreach work, recognizing that complex societal needs often require collective effort.

Conversely, the areas where detailed policies were not explicitly found might point to aspects of the university’s vision that are either less developed, less centralized, or left to the discretion of individual units. For example, not having clear policies on overall strategic planning or how to allocate resources might mean that while the university values outreach, it hasn’t clearly defined how to prioritize, fund, and connect different types of engagement across the whole institution. In the same way, not having clear policies on how to work with outside partners or handle intellectual property for outreach might show that the university doesn’t focus as much on having a formal plan for these areas, which could allow for some flexibility, but might also mean there’s no unified approach as intended.

In summary, the documented policies paint a clear picture of an institutional vision that values applied scholarship, external engagement, and diverse forms of faculty contribution alongside traditional teaching and research. They establish rigorous processes for evaluating and rewarding these contributions, thereby operationalizing the vision of an engaged university. The less detailed policy areas might represent opportunities to further refine and formalize the strategic vision in areas critical to the future growth and impact of outreach and faculty engagement.

These specific references to policy documents, guidelines, and forms found on each university's website are direct evidence needed to translate the vision of institutions committed to practical requirements and expectations for faculty.

Theme 3: Promotion

University Outreach Recognition and Communication. The promotion theme demonstrates the ways higher education administration uses their websites to pass along information about the way their faculty represent university outreach. University websites, evidenced by the sourced webpages, serve several functions in communicating how faculty represent university outreach.

✓ Highlight faculty involvement in programs: UGA's website mentions that "faculty, staff, and students in all of UGA's schools and colleges" contribute to public service and outreach ("About Public Service - UGA," 2024). Auburn University notes that they "actively engage its faculty and students in the outreach mission through service-learning courses and community-based projects in the university's academic programs" ("Outreach at Auburn," 2025a; Auburn University Outreach, 2025). These statements, accessible on their respective websites, directly communicate the broad involvement of faculty in outreach efforts.

✓ Showcasing specific units and initiatives: UGA's website lists various PSO units, implying faculty within those units are directly engaged in outreach activities ("About Public Service - UGA," 2024). Similarly, Auburn mentions eight specialized centers, institutes, and offices within University Outreach, suggesting faculty leadership and participation in these ("Outreach at Auburn," 2025a). The MSU Center for Community Engaged-Learning website provides information about their staff, who work

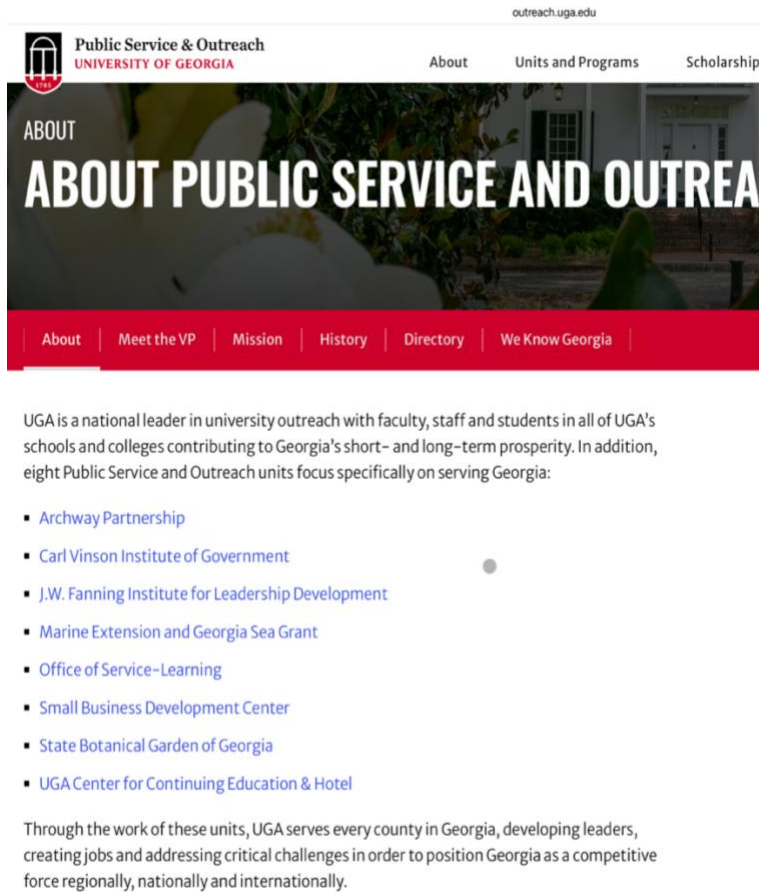
with faculty, indicating faculty collaboration in their initiatives (“About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025).

✓ Providing Contacts Information and Directories: Auburn’s website specifically mentions a “helpful directory of faculty contacts university wide.” This feature directly facilitates connections between the public, other institutions, and faculty engaged in outreach activities, effectively showcasing faculty expertise in specific areas.

✓ Prominent display of University Mission and Values: Using the website to emphasize the importance of service, community engagement, and application of university knowledge to society’s needs is an approach that frames faculty outreach efforts as a crucial factor in the advancing the university’s core values and strategic direction (“About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025; “Mission Statement - UGA,” 2023).

✓ Emphasizing tradition and history: UGA’s website describes its deep history of outreach programs and community service along with highlighting the ongoing faculty engagement and staff contributions to founding the institution (“History - UGA,” 2024).

Using websites as a storytelling technique makes for a high-quality recruitment tool to attract more faculty as outreach representatives and showcase their outreach efforts. Higher education administration communicates how they align university outreach with the institution’s mission and defines how it achieves institutional goals.



This image is a screenshot of the About Public Service & Outreach webpage that lists the units the University of Georgia works through to “position Georgia as a competitive force regionally, nationally and internationally.

Both AU and UGA call attention to student engagement, faculty expertise, and community impact in the publication of their newsletters and showcase of awards.

Promoting and publicizing their commitment to community engagement, economic stability, and educating the people of Alabama and Georgia to better their lives is demonstrated through their collaborations, projects, and programs. For example, Auburn Across Alabama is a program that uses institutional resources and community partnerships to understand local issues in all 67 counties and work with the community to develop solutions. UGA uses public art, tourism, and economic development to restore and revive rural areas, emphasizing the close relationship between the university and the state of Georgia to serve the public good.

Though the institution leads the way in reciprocal and beneficial community engagement, there is an expectation that faculty members take control of their careers to incorporate public service and engagement in their job responsibilities (“Award for Excellence,” 2024). In the PSO, they “work very closely with faculty to find them, one challenge [they] face is getting to faculty before the work has been done so [they] can best report on it, convincing faculty there is value in storytelling around their outreach efforts and distributing said content to all the stakeholders to raise the profile of the work, those doing it and its impact” (University of Georgia, personal communication, March 2025).

To provide support in applying their academic expertise to the university and unit missions, the university Faculty Handbook defines outreach in relation to the direct benefit of external partners. In addition to the handbook, there is a dedicated office to support and promote faculty engagement in outreach. As a space for direct communication and the collective construction of understanding about outreach, the Office of Faculty Engagement leads coordination of workshops, recognizes faculty through awards and events (the Annual Outreach and Engaged Scholarship Symposium), and maintains a communication network and databases of outreach programs. To showcase faculty outreach activities and recognize their achievements, a primary channel to feature their projects is in the *Beyond Auburn magazine*. Their stories are communicated in the magazine and the outreach newsletter as a method of providing ongoing updates about the impacts of faculty engagement and potentially inspiring more faculty to participate in outreach initiatives.

Each institution takes recognition and support of their faculty achievements in university outreach by awarding them for their public service, outreach, and community engagement efforts. The variety of awards ranges from funding, public recognition, plaques, and mention in marketing materials serve as direct evidence of how these institutions formally promote and value faculty outreach efforts. Because of their land-grant heritage, student and faculty engagement provides alternative routes to teaching, research, and service that the traditional classroom cannot. Faculty expertise guides hands-on learning experiences, creating an academic environment that connects the classroom with real-world problems.

Statement of Essence

An integral and mutually beneficial relationship between the university and the larger community is at the heart of university outreach programs offered by these institutions. A common goal of both organizations is to improve people's lives and solve pressing social problems by bringing together the three pillars of higher education: teaching, research, and service. This fundamental framework shows that the land-grant mission is for the public good and is not limited to any one program or organization.

In its simplest form, university outreach aims to connect the academic resources and knowledge on a campus with the real-world issues encountered by local communities. This bond encourages a two-way flow of positive energy. As a result, communities have better access to information, answers based on research, and knowledgeable people who can help with both the tactical and strategic aspects of finding solutions to issues and fostering creativity. The institution ensures its scholarship is relevant and impactful while improving its teaching and research by incorporating real-world applications, and it provides students with a wonderful opportunity to

learn through service. Engagement, by its very nature, is an applied learning process that tests and sharpens theoretical understanding through real-world application in community contexts.

Collaboration, responsiveness, and mutual benefit are the threads that weave the shared meanings inside this phenomenon. Working together with the community as stakeholders in making decisions on what is needed, creating solutions to solve problems or issues, and determining metrics to measure results are the types of collaborative activities that establish common ground. The university responds to the community's needs as an authoritative source of knowledge by remaining an invaluable resource for promoting development and solutions to local, state, regional, and global issues. The term mutual benefit refers to the mutual awareness that these collaborations are not one-way acts of kindness but rather changes for the institution and the community to develop and accomplish common goals. As part of this effort, the aim is to boost the university's standing and its impact on society, all while giving locals more agency and preparing them to achieve long-term prosperity.

Although they differ in emphasis, the three meanings of successful university outreach, collaboration, responsiveness, and mutual benefit, are inseparable in practice. To make an outreach campaign that is truly responsive, the work must be done with the community to figure out what they need. To keep the collaborations going and make an impression that lasts, meaningful cooperation has to be mutually beneficial.

Summary of Findings

4-year land-grant institutions in the Deep South depict their university outreach operations through their website to represent their extension of research and scholarship to the local, state, national, and international community. They write down their missions, visions, and

values on their websites as the guide to their efforts. They use policies, handbooks, or forms to transcribe decisions made about the boundaries of how, when, and to whom their research and scholarship extend. They document their activities, initiatives, and events with photographs, award ceremonies, magazines, and news reports for display on their websites.

All of which answers the research questions: how does higher education administration describe university outreach and What are the key channels and methods used by university outreach personnel to communicate outreach for faculty? These findings come from official documents and staff accounts on their daily operations regarding decisions, boundaries, and activity documentation. The university website is the main outlet or display mechanism for much of this information.

In this chapter, I presented findings on higher education administration's description of university outreach as a functional area of university operations. This exploration and the data analysis have implications for influencing the direction of faculty, staff, and student recruitment and retention in university outreach efforts. More specifically, this research addresses the recommendations made by the APLU to acknowledge and recognize alternative forms of outreach scholarship and engagement.

This involves (“Outreach at Auburn,” 2025a; “Mission Statement - UGA,” 2023):

- ✓ Providing educational opportunities to various age groups.
- ✓ Offering technical and strategic assistance to public and private entities.
- ✓ Promoting public service through community involvement.
- ✓ Fostering mutually beneficial knowledge exchange between the university and community.

- ✓ Ensuring accessibility to educational resources, especially in underserved areas.
- ✓ Creating tangible and measurable results with long-term impact.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I connect how phenomenology and actor-network theory (ANT) manifested throughout the findings from Chapter 4 of this study. Each section (mission, vision, and promotion) includes a (1) textural and (2) structural analysis, to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play in university outreach as a functional area of higher education administration. Actor-network theory is employed within this analysis to address the relationships between all the actors of university outreach connecting both human and non-human actors. A phenomenological lens also complements this approach by focusing on the lived experiences and perceptions of those involved, providing a richer understanding of the meanings and impacts of these outreach efforts.

The textural descriptions, deeply informed by phenomenology, explore the subjective experiences and meanings, illustrating how actors experience and interpret the networks and the non-human actors within them. The structural descriptions, largely drawing from ANT, unpack how these descriptions emerge from the network of actors, mapping the relationships and interactions with the network components. By using this dual theoretical approach and structured presentation, this chapter aims to move beyond a simplistic view of outreach to display it as a dynamic network of interacting entities and lived experiences.

Navigating University Outreach Through Theory and Practice

Mission

Textural Description. While ANT provides a framework for understanding the relational dynamics and materialities of university outreach, a phenomenological perspective invites an opportunity to look into the subjective experiences and intentionality of the individuals who constitute and navigate these networks. It takes into consideration how these actors consciously experience, interpret, and make meaning of their involvement in community engagement and

public service initiatives. This provides a more thorough understanding of the human dimension with the structural and relational aspects highlighted by ANT.

Actors and their roles

Human actors. Faculty and staff are actors who translate university expertise into practical applications such as trainings, develop and manage outreach programs that create opportunities, and engage with the community by supporting partners. Service-learning, offered as courses or community-based projects, provides students an avenue for participation in outreach activities as valuable experience that contributes to community development. To identify community needs, develop programs, and assess impact, universities need community partnerships, which typically range from businesses, educational institutions, state and federal agencies, and other organizations. (“About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025; “About Public Service - UGA,” 2024; “History - UGA,” 2024; “Outreach at Auburn,” 2025a).

Non-human actors. Resources are crucial non-human actors allocated and managed by the university administration, including funding, facilities, equipment, and technology. Programs and initiatives address community needs through specific projects, services, and events. UGA’s Archway Partnership, Small Business Development Center, and Marine Extension Service are examples. The Carnegie Foundation and its Community Engagement Classification act as a significant non-human actor that influences the goals and strategies of universities like MSU, UGA, and Auburn. The criteria for this classification (alignment among mission, culture, leadership, resources, and practices) can be seen as shaping the network. It becomes meaningful to university actors through their conscious engagement with its criteria and their intentional efforts to align their practices accordingly.

The various units and programs within UGA's PSO can be considered an actor with its own specific activities and connections. Educational programs, training courses, and outreach events offered by the universities can be seen as non-human actors that facilitate engagement and knowledge exchange.

Policies and regulations shape, frame, and direct outreach efforts as mandates from institutional, state, and federal sources such as the Morrill Act of 1872 and other legislation, formalizing the land-grant mission. The Georgia General Assembly and the U.S. Congress (through the Morrill Act and the National Sea Grant Program) are legislative bodies that established the initial mandates and provided resources that influenced the development of UGA's public service mission.

Mission statements articulate the university's commitment to public service and guide the development of outreach programs. MSU's mission statement supports research, learning, and service through community-engaged learning. These documents include strategic plans that inscribe goals and priorities, influencing the actors within the network. They are not just documents but are experienced and interpreted by individuals, shaping their understanding of the purpose of outreach.

Relationships and interactions. The University Outreach Network is interconnected through various relationships and activities. For example, CCEL staff work with faculty and community partners. UGA's outreach units collaborate to serve communities across Georgia. Auburn University Outreach partners with businesses and schools. These connections form the network through which influence and action flow.

Practices and activities. The actors within the network interpret, shape, and align the interests of other actors within the network. For example, the MSU Community Engagement Committee (CEC) can be considered a key actor involved in translating the university's institutional goals into concrete community engagement strategies to meet the Carnegie Foundation's criteria. The mission statements of CCEL and UGA's PSO also act as mechanisms for translation, defining the purpose and direction of outreach activities that influence the actions of those involved. The Morrill Act translated a national interest in agricultural and mechanical arts into a mandate for land-grant universities like UGA and Auburn to engage in outreach.

Experiences and meanings. Certain values, goals, or practices are embedded into material forms or organizational structures through inscription. The establishment of centers like CCEL and UGA's various outreach units inscribes the universities' commitment to community engagement and public service into their organizational structure. The development of specific programs and curricula within these centers further inscribes particular approaches to outreach and engagement. The Carnegie Classification itself inscribes a set of criteria for what constitutes successful community engagement.

Structural Description. Networks comprise various components that serve as nodes to connect different actors and facilitate the flow of resources and information. The university outreach network forms through the translation process where the university's mission and resources are aligned with community needs.

Power dynamics. Various actors have power to negotiate, collaborate, and mutually adapt resources, expertise, and institutional authority.

Universities as anchors. Mississippi State University, University of Georgia, and Auburn University serve as central nodes in the network that respond to their land-grant mandates with resources and expertise readily available to the community. The centers themselves: CCEL at MSU, PSO at UGA, and University Outreach at Auburn—act as nodes identifying and defining community needs and issues by organizing and coordinating outreach efforts. (“Outreach at Auburn,” 2025a; “About - Mission & History - CCEL,” 2025; “History - UGA,” 2024)

Centralization and Decentralization. Universities provide resources and allocate resources to implement programs, while individual colleges, departments, and outreach centers have autonomy in designing the concepts, tools, or artifacts that facilitate communication and coordination between diverse actors in the network.

Boundary objects. Using the mission statement as a boundary object ensures there is a framework for understanding and action, involving ongoing assessment, reflection, and adaptation where outcomes and impacts are evaluated and used to refine programs and strategies.

Network stability. The perceived success of outreach efforts depends on the stability of the network deriving from the strength of the relationships between actors and the availability of resources. The networks are subject to disruption by changes in funding, shifts in priorities, or conflicts between actors.

Using actor-network theory to understand the dynamics of university outreach can provide a perspective that it’s not just a set of programs, but rather dynamic networks of interacting entities, where the goals and activities of each actor are shaped by its relationships

with others. For example, the success of CCEL's Carnegie reapplication was not solely due to the efforts of the CEC working group but also depended on the alignment of various actors (university leadership, faculty, community partners) and their practices with the criteria defined by the Carnegie Foundation. Similarly, the long history of UGA's public service reflects a sustained process of translation and inscription, where the initial mandate of a state-chartered and later a land-grant university was translated into concrete outreach programs and inscribed within the university's culture and structure.

Vision

Textural Description. ANT in the context of the vision theme emphasizes how the diverse actors are intertwined in the network, where each actor (human or non-human) has the potential to influence the others. For example, a policy document (non-human actor) dictates the format and content of the dossier (non-human actor), which in turn shapes the work presented by the faculty candidate (human actor) and how it is evaluated by the department head (human actor) and the committee (human actors). The successful acquisition of extramural funding (non-human actor/outcome) positively influences the valuation of a candidate's research or creative work (human actor/activity). The impact of outreach activities (non-human concept/outcome) as documented in the dossier (non-human actor) is a crucial element for promotion, especially for public service and outreach faculty (human actors). The impact of outreach activities, as document in the dossier, is crucial for promotion, especially for public service and outreach faculty.

The stability of these networks depends on processes of translation and enrollment, where actors are aligned, and their interests are made to coincide. For instance, university policies (non-human) attempt to enroll faculty (human) in certain modes of scholarly activity and

documentation by linking them to the desired outcome of promotion and tenure. Community needs (part of the network surrounding outreach) can translate into specific outreach programs led by faculty, which in turn require resources and institutional support to be successfully enacted and recognized.

ANT provides a way to map the complex web of relationships and influences within the university's academic and outreach ecosystem, highlighting the agency of both human and non-human actors. Phenomenology offers a lens to understand the subjective experiences, intentionality, and meaning-making processes of the individuals operating within these networks.

By considering how the actors experience and interpret the networks and the non-human actors within them, we can gain a more profound understanding of the dynamics of faculty promotion and tenure, public service and outreach, and related university activities.

Structural description. The dossier functions as a phenomenal object in ANT, is a non-human mediator in the evaluation process. Phenomenologically, it can be considered a phenomenal object laden with the intentionality and lived experiences of the candidate. It is not just a collection of documents but a representation of their professional journey and aspirations, intended to be perceived and interpreted by the evaluators.

Evaluation as an intersubjective experience: while ANT focuses on the network of influences, phenomenology highlights the intersubjective nature of evaluation. The department head, committee members, and external reviewers bring their own lived experiences, values, and interpretations to the evaluation of the dossier. The outcome of the evaluation is not solely determined by the network structure but also by the shared and sometimes conflicting understandings of merit, impact, and potential.

Outreach as intentionally meaningful engagement: ANT can map the networks involved in outreach, including faculty, community partners, funding agencies, and the programs themselves. Phenomenology allows us to explore the lived meaning of this engagement for the faculty member—their sense of purpose, their commitment to addressing societal needs, and the reciprocal relationships formed with the community. The emphasis on the public or common good in the definition of outreach scholarship points to the intentional values underlying this work.

Policy serves as a framework for lived experience: university policies and guidelines which are non-human actors in ANT, provide a framework that shapes the lived experiences of faculty. They set expectations, define criteria for success, and structure the processes of appointment and promotion. Faculty members navigate these frameworks by interpreting them and acting within them. Their experience of these policies—whether they find them enabling or constraining, fair or unfair—influences their engagement with the university.

Human actors

- ✓ Faculty candidates: individuals seeking promotion or tenure. Their actions included preparing dossiers, engaging in teaching, research, outreach, and service, and responding to evaluations.
- ✓ Department heads/chairs/unit directors/deans: These administrative figures play critical roles in evaluation, recommendation, and the solidification of external reviews.
- ✓ Faculty colleagues (voting and review committees): tenured faculty and those of higher rank participate in the evaluation process.

- ✓ External reviewers: nationally or internationally recognized experts who provide confidential evaluations of a candidate's work for promotion to associate or full professor.
- ✓ University and college-level promotion and tenure committees review dossiers and make recommendations at higher levels of the university.
- ✓ The university president and provost hold the ultimate authority for granting tenure and approving promotions.
- ✓ Outreach professionals and continuing education liaisons: staff who coordinate and report on outreach activities and CEUs.
- ✓ Community partners, clients, and external audiences: recipients and collaborators in outreach activities.
- ✓ Students: recipients of teaching and sometimes participating in outreach activities.

Non-human actors

- ✓ Policy documents and guidelines: documents prescribing the rules, criteria, and procedures that shape the interactions of human actors.
- ✓ The dossier: a central artifact that assembles evidence of the candidate's accomplishments.
- ✓ Evaluation letters (student, peer, external): written accounts that carry weight in the evaluation process.
- ✓ Publications, performances, grants, awards, and other scholarly products: these serve as tangible evidence of a faculty member's research, creative work, and outreach contributions.

- ✓ Continuing education units (CEUs): formal acknowledgments of participation in non-credit learning activities.
- ✓ Technology (online portals, websites, electronic products): platforms used for reporting outreach activities, requesting CEUs, and delivering educational content.
- ✓ Concepts (quality, impact, scholarship, collegiality, academic freedom, university and unit missions): abstract entities that influence the evaluation and decision-making processes.

Promotion

Textural Description. From an ANT perspective, the communication of outreach to faculty happens through a network of diverse channels and methods, each playing a role in shaping faculty understanding and participation.

At UGA, outreach is deeply embedded in its identity as a ‘public service-oriented university.’ This historical context, stemming from the vision of Chancellor Walter Barnard Hill, inspired the ‘Wisconsin Idea,’ which positions outreach as a fundamental mission alongside teaching and service. The Walter Barnard Hill Awards and Hill Fellow Award explicitly recognize ‘sustained, distinguished, and superb achievements in university public service and outreach, and contributions to improving the quality of life in Georgia or elsewhere.’ These awards, UGA’s highest in public service and outreach, define outreach as applying academic expertise for the public or common good, addressing societal needs, and generating new knowledge. The achievements of award recipients who focus on economic development; involved in agricultural extension; supporting small business development; promoting marine education; and ensuring water and feed safety, showcase the diverse applications of outreach at UGA. The Engaged Scholar Award highlights outreach through ‘engaged research and

scholarship,’ ‘curricular engagement of students in academic service-learning courses,’ and ‘mutually beneficial community-university partnerships that address critical community needs.’ This all demonstrates that UGA administration values outreach that is collaborative, reciprocal, and addresses real-world problems.

Auburn University’s Award for Excellence in Faculty Outreach similarly honors faculty engagement that has a ‘tremendous impact on the community, state, nation, and beyond.’ Applying ‘academic expertise to the direct benefit of external audiences in support of university and unit missions’ is the definition of outreach at Auburn University. The view of outreach as a shared responsibility with community partners is the reflection of this award and emphasizes ‘collaboration, reciprocity, and mutuality.’ Further emphasis on ‘ongoing and purposeful commitment to implementing outreach’ and understanding ‘civic and community engagement, interpersonal relationships, and serving the underserved’ is showcased through the Dr. Royrickers Cook Endowed Engagement Award. This highlights the administrative value placed on sustained engagement, community focus, and addressing the needs of marginalized populations.

Instead of describing their collaborations between the institution and communities, MSU uses community engagement. It is a mutually beneficial exchange of resources and knowledge with accomplishments often recognized by the Excellence in Community Engagement Awards in categories of ‘Community-Engaged Service, Community-Engaged Teaching and Learning, and Scholarship of Engagement. This framework indicates that MSU administration views community engagement (a significant aspect of outreach) as an integral part of the university’s threefold mission of learning, research, and service. There is an emphasis on ‘mutually beneficial exchange’ and ‘partnership and reciprocity’ that echoes the values seen at UGA and Auburn. The

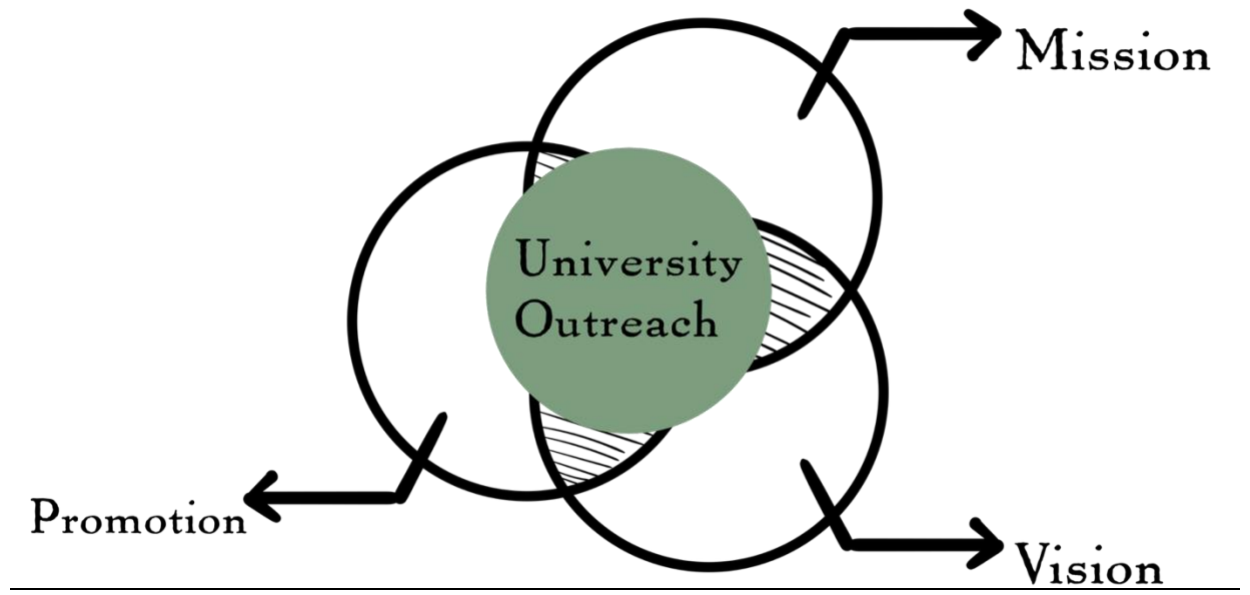
CCEL mini grants support the development and implementation of ‘community-engaged learning opportunities for MSU students, integrating ‘meaningful community engagement into an academic course through experiential learning and critical reflection.’ This initiative highlights the administration’s push to embed outreach-like activities within the curriculum.

Structural Description. Actor-network theory helps us see how this description emerges from a network of actors. Administrators like the Vice President for University Outreach and Associate Provost at Auburn act as key nodes, leading articulation of the value of outreach through publications like “Beyond Auburn” (“Beyond Auburn Winter 2023,” 2023). Acting as non-human to disseminate the administration’s message while showcasing examples of exceptional outreach, the print material couples well with events like the annual outreach and engaged scholarship symposium to demonstrate the value and importance of outreach as a collective experience for the campus community (UGA Public Service and Outreach [Office of the Vice President], 2024a). The Royrickers Cook Endowed Engagement Award and the Award for Excellence in Faculty Outreach are organized evaluations of outreach by the administration that recognize and celebrate faculty contributions. UGA Public Service and Outreach administration view experiential learning as a key component to their outreach efforts and highlight the university’s mission to serve the state of Georgia by empowering students to connect their classroom experiences with public service (UGA Public Service and Outreach [Office of the Vice President], 2024b).

So that outreach is considered less of a solo pursuit, rather a networked activity, faculty, staff, students, and community partners reinforce their roles as actors of both internal and external collaborations (“Beyond Auburn Winter 2023,” 2023). The tangible outcomes and resulting impacts on communities are described by the administration in areas of improved

healthcare access, economic development, and education opportunities (*Beyond Auburn Magazine*, 2025).

Discussion



Aligning Strategic Administration of University Outreach: Integration of Communication, Technology, and Documentation. In this section, I attempt to elaborate on how these administrative functions of university outreach intersect and are leveraged by university administration to achieve institutional goals.

The flow of information and interactions across the university outreach network depends on communication and technology. These enable technological mediums, such as university websites, online portals, learning management systems, and customer relationship management systems, to act as non-human actors and essential platforms and tools for communication, cooperation, and information sharing. University administration uses technology to facilitate course delivery, support personal learning networks, coordinate the execution of outreach policies, and promote career pathing by removing temporal and spatial restrictions on

communication. Administration, also, leverages these technologies to market, promote, and recognize outreach activities, events, and programs as a method of communication with internal and external stakeholders.

The most effective communication strategies involve messages that are persuasively crafted to highlight the benefits and outcomes of engagement while ensuring clarity and inclusivity using diverse digital channels like e-newsletters and social media. Challenges can arise when employing communication and technology, such as information overload, institutional technological limitations, language barriers, and an increasing need for robust data privacy protocols. Therefore, strategic administration has to balance adopting technology while consistently establishing clear guidelines for use, assessing effectiveness in reaching target audiences, and achieving university outreach goals.

As a method that translates and inscribes the outputs and impact of university outreach into tangible forms, documentation is a critical administrative function and a non-human actor. Documenting aspects of university outreach, especially non-human actors like dossiers, reports, and digital records, is essential for demonstrating the value of faculty engagement and scholarship that links their work to social needs and displays how it benefits the public. The dossier, for instance, is particularly central to the evaluation process for supporting faculty members' career advancement in promotion and tenure, as it embodies their professional journeys and contributions to the institution. Strategic administration requires establishing systems for documenting institutional outreach activities and impacts, including reflective commentary on major programs, completed objectives, communication methods, and stakeholder contributions.

These reporting and compliance systems, often supported by technology like online portals or CRM systems, guide strategic planning and ensure alignment with the institution's mission. While essential, documenting outreach can be a struggle for university outreach personnel at an organizational level, highlighting a need for administrative support and clear processes. Visual evidence, participant stories, and testimonies also play a role in documenting effectiveness and communicating worth to stakeholders.

Strategic alignment and administrative support represent the role of the university and its leadership as key human actors and the central node in the network, providing the framework, resources, and policies that shape outreach. Administrators, from unit directors to the president, articulate the value of outreach through various channels, awards, and strategic plans, reinforcing it as a networked activity central to the land-grant institution's identity and mission. Policies and regulations, as non-human actors, serve as frameworks that set expectations, define criteria, and structure processes related to outreach, promotion, and resource allocation.

Strategic planning for outreach involves needs assessments, impact evaluations, and aligning college or unit goals with institutional priorities. Dedicating resources for faculty development, fiscal management of grants and fee-for-service activities, and building community partnerships are all elements of administrative support. Inconsistencies and silos in policies arise from challenges in balancing communication and technology, especially regarding the recognition of outreach in the promotion and tenure process, as well as limitations in resource allocation, faculty engagement, and the strategic output of university outreach. This means that the administration needs to carefully work on making sure that policies, resources, and reward systems are all in sync to truly support and appreciate outreach activities, while also using clear documentation to show how accountability and recognition are handled.

The main aim of university outreach is to manage activities in a way that matches the university's mission and goals, encourages faculty involvement, shows the impact through communication and technology, and includes documentation that builds strong connections with community partners.

Incorporating the Framework and the Role of Medium in Shaping Mission, Vision, and Promotion

The framework identified in this discussion section, encompassing the integration of communication, technology, documentation, strategic alignment, and administrative support, serves as a critical lens for understanding the dynamics of university outreach. Viewed through the theoretical perspective of Actor-Network Theory, this is not merely a collection of administrative functions but a heterogeneous network where human and non-human actors interact, translate, and inscribe meaning, thereby shaping the perceived and operationalized aspects of the university's Mission, Vision, and approach to Promotion regarding outreach.

ANT posits that entities, whether human (like administrators, faculty, staff, or community partners) or non-human (like policies, websites, documents, awards, or technology platforms), possess agency within a network. The shape of university outreach's Mission, Vision, and Promotion is thus an effect of the collective performance and interactions within this network, not solely determined by stated goals or individual actions.

I'd like to consider how the medium, in line with ANT principles, is intrinsically part of the message and influences the shape of these three thematic areas:

Mission. The university's mission regarding outreach is not merely an abstract statement but is actively performed and shaped by the mediums through which it is communicated and enacted. Policies, such as those formalizing the land-grant mandate or establishing designated

outreach divisions, act as non-human actants that inscribe the mission into institutional structure and direct action. The university website, as a technological medium, serves as a primary channel to disseminate mission statements, historical narratives, and descriptions of activities, thereby actively shaping both internal and external stakeholders' understanding of the outreach mission. Auburn's description of its outreach activities through the "Instruct, Assist, Service" framework, publicized on its website, or UGA's articulation of its PSO mission to "improve people's lives" through specific units and programs, demonstrates how the medium (website, program descriptions, policy documents) translates the broad mission into concrete, perceivable components. This translation process, central to ANT, shows how the medium makes the mission tangible and actionable, aligning institutional commitments with the actions of human actors.

Vision. The institutional vision for outreach, often articulated in strategic plans and handbooks, is similarly shaped by the mediums that formalize and disseminate it. Policy documents outlining criteria for faculty advancement, for example, are non-human actants that embody the university's vision of what constitutes valued contributions, including outreach. The medium of the faculty handbook or the P&T guidelines translates this vision into specific expectations and requirements for faculty behavior and documentation. UGA's detailed Note 3 on documenting impact in PSO promotion guidelines provides a granular example of how a specific policy document (medium) shapes the very understanding and practice of evaluating outreach impact, reflecting a vision of outreach as results-focused applied scholarship. Websites hosting these policies and guidelines facilitate access and interpretation, influencing faculty members lived experiences and their navigation of these frameworks. The lack of detailed policies in certain areas, as noted in the findings, also shapes the vision by signifying areas that

are less centralized or formalized, demonstrating how the absence of a specific medium (policy) can leave certain aspects of the vision less defined.

Promotion. The recognition and promotion of faculty outreach are profoundly shaped by the mediums and channels used for communication and documentation. Awards, such as the Walter Barnard Hill Award at UGA or the Award for Excellence in Faculty Outreach at Auburn, are non-human actants and mediums that explicitly define, value, and perform the concept of distinguished outreach. The criteria for these awards, disseminated through calls for nominations and institutional websites, act as prescriptive texts that shape what counts as notable outreach accomplishment. Publications like Auburn's *Beyond Auburn magazine* or outreach newsletters serve as mediums to showcase faculty stories and achievements, actively translating the impact of their work for broader audiences and reinforcing the value placed on outreach for promotion. Documentation, formalized in the faculty dossier (a key non-human actant and artifact) is the primary medium through which dynamic outreach activities are translated into a static form for evaluation in the promotion and tenure process. The design of reporting systems or online portals (technological mediums) further shapes how faculty must document their work, aligning their reporting practices with evaluation needs and thereby influencing the feasibility and recognition of their outreach efforts. The finding that faculty struggle with organizational-level documentation, highlights a misalignment within the network where the medium for reporting (technology or systems) may not adequately support the diverse forms of outreach activity, impacting their ability to demonstrate impact for promotion.

In essence, the framework for communication, technology, documentation, strategic alignment, and administrative support, when analyzed through ANT, reveals a complex network where the mediums employed (policies, websites, awards, documents, platforms) are not passive

conduits but active participants that shape the reality and perception of university outreach's Mission, Vision, and the avenues for faculty Promotion. This perspective moves beyond simply describing what outreach is to understanding how it is enacted, valued, and structured through the dynamic interactions of human and non-human actors within the network, with the medium playing a constitutive role.

Linking Findings Back to the Literature Reviewed in Chapter 2

The following section is an explicit connection of the empirical findings to the existing body of scholarly work presented in the literature review in Chapter 2. This is an attempt to demonstrate how this study contributes to, confirms, or provides new insights into the scholarly discourse on university outreach, higher education administration, and the application of ANT.

Framing And Definition of University Outreach. Chapter 2 established the historical evolution of university outreach from its agricultural origins to its current multifaceted role in economic development and community advancement. It notes that outreach is a constantly changing mix of meanings, values, and goals influenced by administration. These findings align with this, showing that higher education administration frames outreach directly across institutions, ranging from a foundation for deeper engagement at MSU to a broad public service mission encompassing applied research and technical assistance at UGA, and a mutually beneficial knowledge exchange at Auburn. The reliance on the land-grant heritage at AU and UGA emphasizes the historical trajectory noted in the literature, while MSU's explicit framing of community engagement highlights the evolving terminology discussed in Chapter 2 where outreach and engagement are often used interchangeably or in conjunction. The study's detailed descriptions of how administration frames outreach through specific frameworks (Instruct,

Assist, Service), designated offices, and partnerships, provides empirical depth to the literature's assertion that administration expresses the meaning and goals of outreach.

Faculty Engagement and Challenges. Chapter 2 literature discusses challenges faced by faculty in engaging in outreach, particularly concerning recognition within traditional academic reward systems and resource limitations. The findings strongly resonate with this literature. The observation at UGA about the imbalance in valuing outreach compared to research and teaching, the need for more resources and recognition in tenure and promotion, and the ambiguity of traditional academic reward systems regarding outreach scholarship directly support and provide specific institutional examples for challenges outlined in the literature. The finding that faculty struggle to dedicate time due to stringent P&T criteria, especially where there are no incentives, is mirrored in the literature. The study's exploration of how institutions attempt to address this through policy guidelines, awards, and support offices adds empirical detail on administrative strategies, which the literature suggests are often lacking or unclear.

Communication methods. The literature review emphasizes the importance of communication in university outreach and mentions various channels like email, social media, and events. The findings expand upon this by detailing the specific key channels and methods employed by university outreach personnel at the studied institutions, categorizing them into calls for award nominations, digital platforms, events or meetings, internal communications, and direct support. The use of websites as central hubs, e-newsletters or emails, social media, and internal platforms confirms the digital mediums mentioned in the literature. The findings on awards ceremonies and symposiums as communication forums elaborate on the role of events discussed in Chapter 2. The explicit discussion of communication challenges like information overload and data privacy in Chapter 2 is implicitly addressed in the need for persuasive

messaging and assessing communication effectiveness noted in the findings. The study's detailed examples of how these channels are used to showcase faculty involvement, highlight units, provide contacts, and convey mission or values offer empirical evidence of the practical application of communication strategies discussed more broadly in the literature.

Role of Policy, Administration, and Funding. Chapter 2 highlights that higher education policy significantly shapes outreach experiences, influencing funding, reward systems, and resource management. It notes the decline in state financial support and the varied sources of funding. These findings confirm the centrality of administration in structuring outreach and defining goals. The policies and guidelines for P&T explicitly demonstrate how administration attempts to integrate outreach into the formal reward system, aligning with the literature's focus on policy influence. The findings emphasize that administration controls resource allocation, which directly impacts the capacity of outreach, echoing the resource limitations discussed in Chapter 2. While this study did not delve deeply into funding sources, the findings emphasize on the need for more resources and administrative support for faculty development and financial management of grants reinforces the literature's points about funding implications. The structure of the universities, with centralized outreach divisions or decentralized units, reflects different administrative approaches to organizing outreach, adding detail to the literature's discussion of leadership.

Actor-Network Theory Application. Chapter 2 introduces ANT as the main theoretical framework, explaining its concepts like networks, actors (human and non-human), translation, inscription, and the agency of objects. The findings in Chapter 5 serve as direct application and empirical demonstration of these concepts within the specific context of university outreach communication dynamics. The mapping of the heterogenous network of actors involved in

outreach and P&T operationalizes ANT's core network ontology. The detailed descriptions of how policies, documents (like the dossier), technology, and awards function as non-human actants with agency provide concrete examples of ANT's principle of generalized symmetry and the role of non-human entities. The discussion of translation as the process by which university mission is embedded in policy, community needs become programs, or activities are documented for P&T directly utilized a central ANT concept. Similarly, inscription is demonstrated through the establishment of outreach centers, the criteria embedded in awards, and the documentation process, showing how values and practices are embedded into material forms. By applying ANT to understand how these elements collectively produce the perceived value and structure of outreach for faculty promotion, the study empirically validates and elaborates upon the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 2, providing a subtle understanding of power as an effect of network performance.

In summary, the study's findings do not merely restate the existing literature rather it actively engages with it. Through document analysis and interviews with university outreach personnel at AU, UGA, and MSU provide examples of the deeper context of historical development, administrative functions, communication challenges, and faculty engagement issues discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 operationalized and applied the theoretical framework of ANT introduced in Chapter 2, which provided an empirical lens to view the complex, network reality of university outreach administration and faculty engagement to expand the scholarly understanding of how these processes unravel in practice.

Recommendations

Research. Studying the descriptions of faculty involvement as described on each university's website would extend the topic of university outreach communication structures.

The focus would be on a more specific case of higher education, the method and structure of faculty representation, rather than the administrative aspect. The task would include identifying potential areas of conflict or misalignment within the university outreach network. Are there conflicting expectations between different actors? Are certain voices marginalized or excluded?

Marketing communications' role in supporting outreach could be a research focus. The goal of this study could explore how marketing and communications strategies enhance the visibility, recognition, and impact of faculty research through outreach. This study could examine the effectiveness of various communication channels, messaging strategies, and storytelling methods in conveying the value of community-engaged scholarship to both the campus and broader community.

There could be an analysis of how changes in policy or technology might disrupt or reshape the network. How might new evaluation metrics or online platforms alter the dynamics of promotion and tenure?

Further research could look into how various stakeholder groups view the legitimacy and value of outreach scholarship in relation to faculty responsibilities and university missions. These groups could be administrators, community partners, and lawmakers. It's possible there will be useful data using qualitative methods like focus groups and interviews to examine how the promotion and tenure process plays a role in faculty teaching, research, and service.

Another area of inquiry could be a focus on how the faculty experience is valued through peer-reviewed publications in research journals versus an outreach publication.

Implications for Practice

This study, analyzing how higher education administration describes and communicates university outreach, is crucial for several reasons relevant to administration and operations. The role university outreach has in faculty affairs is closely tied to faculty career advancement, which depends heavily on professional evaluations along with the way they document and demonstrate their outreach scholarship impact. University outreach personnel recognize outreach practices and fulfill the institution's strategic goals by establishing supportive policies and building external partnerships that influence various administrative functions. To ensure the university's outreach mission is well-supported, attention to faculty affairs, outreach administration, external relations, and strategic planning will benefit the institution.

Efforts to frame the institution's mission and vision, faculty promotion, and tenure are an avenue that will showcase the effectiveness and impact of the university's service as notable accomplishments in teaching and outreach. Demonstrating merit for promotion and tenure must be documented as scholarship linked to societal needs where faculty expertise generated public benefit.

In tandem with faculty affairs, outreach personnel have a responsibility to engage in a cyclical process of documenting institutional outreach activities and impacts, including reflective commentary on major outreach programs that address unfulfilled needs, completed objectives, methods for communicating with target audiences, and personal contributions from campus stakeholders. Outreach staff, along with faculty affairs, need to regularly record what outreach activities they do and their effects, including thoughts on important programs that meet unmet needs, goals achieved, ways to reach target audiences, and input from campus members. It is crucial for university outreach personnel to actively participate in their own scholarly pursuits,

enabling them to clearly explain faculty expertise in interdisciplinary collaborations that generate or restore knowledge. In doing so, illustrating both quantitative and qualitative impacts increases the institution's public service and outreach reputation with campus stakeholders.

Executive leaders may find the ongoing practice of outreach as an administrative function of higher education operations useful in shaping existing public service and engagement efforts.

Transform the university outreach space in various ways:

Faculty development backed with financial management: dedicate administrative operations that provide resources and oversight of grants, contracts, and fee-for-service outreach that support faculty development in community-engaged pedagogy, partnership building, and impact assessment. Having specific administrative processes for financial accountability established and managed through a centralized support structure.

Improve the efficiency of faculty outreach documentation with the help of AI-assisted systems. Applications in this area could use natural language processing (NLP) to glean useful information from narrative reports, spot trends in the impacts of various projects, and propose alignments or ways to meet promotion and tenure requirements. When it comes to documentation, faculty can reap the benefits of AI's capacity to automate data compilation and initial analysis. Artificial intelligence can help faculty with documentation by automating data compilation and initial analysis. Formal and measurable artifacts will better capture their engaging work. Additionally, higher education administration can now meet the institutional requirement of regularly evaluating and improving outreach programs, all because of tech developments.

Using immersive digital environments that foster deeper engagement, experiential outreach can reframe traditional outreach. The potential for traditional university outreach to be revolutionized by virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) is vast. With VR and AR, the possibilities that might revolutionize traditional university outreach include AR applications that showcase university research in community settings, interactive simulations of public health campaigns, or VR campus access that allows students to participate in experiential learning environments. Implementing these technologies will mesh the university's mission with its faculty expertise to have a greater reach and impact on the people it serves.

Use AI-driven content translation and personalization tools to make university outreach more accessible and engaging to a range of external audiences. Implementing AI to simplify complex research findings for public consumption or streamline real-time language translation has the potential to automate personalized outreach messages through customer relationship management systems. By collaborating with digital platforms, university outreach bridges the gap between ineffective information distribution to greatly increase the reach and resonance of messages.

Building upon outreach administration, strategic planning should include needs assessments and impact evaluations using reporting and compliance systems. These should guide the university's strategic planning and align college and unit-level outreach goals with the institution's mission and priorities. Tracking outreach activities requires the development of online reposting systems managed by administrative staff (ideally involving senior outreach-focused faculty) to ensure compliance with regulations.

For higher education administration to frame the dynamics of university outreach, this study provides valuable insights into how the presentation of public service and community

engagement is a communication method. The knowledge generated here is important for strategic management that supports and enhances outreach operations, ensures alignment with the institutional mission and vision and strengthens its' relationship with campus stakeholders.

Concluding Remarks

The preceding discussion meticulously lays bare the intricate dynamics at play, moving beyond a simplistic view of outreach as a mere set of programs to reveal it as a complex, dynamic network of interacting entities.

The analytical strength of this study resides in its dual theoretical foundation. Actor-network theory provides a robust framework for mapping the relational dynamics and materialities inherent in university outreach, identifying a network populated by both human actors, such as faculty, staff, students, community partners, and administrators, and non-human actors, including resources, programs, policies, mission statements, and classification criteria. This framework allows for the conceptualization of the university outreach network as an interconnected web where influence and action flow through various relationships and activities. The processes of translation and inscription, central to ANT, emerge as crucial mechanisms through which interested are aligned, values are embedded, and the network is shaped and stabilized. For instance, mission statements and strategic plans act as non-human actors that translate institutional commitments into guiding principles, including the actions of human actors. Similarly, criteria from external bodies like the Carnegie Foundation serve to translate broader notions of community engagement into specific metrics that shape institutional practices and actor behaviors.

The documentation process, particularly evident in the context of faculty promotion, exemplifies inscription, where accomplishments are embedded into material forms like dossiers,

serving as tangible evidence within the network. Complementing the structural mapping provided by ANT, the phenomenological lens brings into sharp relief the subjective experiences, intentionality, and meaning-making processes of individuals immersed within these networks. This perspective is vital for understanding how actors consciously experience, interpret, and make meaning of their involvement in community engagement and public service initiatives. The textural descriptions deeply informed by this phenomenological sensitivity, exploring how policies are experienced, how documents like the dossier are perceived, and the lived meaning of outreach engagement for faculty members, including their sense of purpose and commitment to addressing societal needs.

The evaluation process itself is illuminated not just as a network of influences but as an intersubjective experience, shaped by the lived experiences, values, and interpretations of evaluators. This dual perspective, structural through ANT and experiential through phenomenology, offers a richer, more thorough understanding of the human dimension alongside the structural and relational aspects of university outreach.

The findings related to the textual and structural descriptions across the themes of mission, vision, and promotion highlighted the administrative centrality and strategic importance of university outreach. Regarding mission, the text highlights how institutional identity and historical context, such as the land-grant mandate influences like the Wisconsin Idea, are inscribed into the very fabric of the university, guiding the development of outreach programs and shaping the network. Administrators act as key nodes, articulating the value of outreach through various channels, reinforcing it as a networked activity rather than a solo pursuit.

In terms of vision, the study illustrates how non-human actors like policy documents and evaluation criteria intertwine with human actors (faculty, administrators, reviewers) in shaping

processes like faculty promotion and tenure. The dossier, which acts as both a non-human mediator and an important object with purpose, is a key part of this network. The theme of promotion further exemplifies the depth of how embedded outreach is within the institutional reward system, where awards and recognition schemes explicitly define and value specific types of community-engaged work, demonstrating administrative priorities and the mechanisms for reinforcing desired practices.

The practical implications derived from this analysis are significant for university administration and operations. Understanding how outreach is described and communicated is crucial, as it directly impacts faculty career advancement, administrative functions, external partnerships, and strategic planning. The study emphasizes the necessity for clear documentation of outreach scholarship and its impact, linking it to societal needs and public benefit, which requires collaboration between faculty affairs and outreach personnel.

Looking forward, this research prompts avenues for continued scholarly inquiry in university outreach as a functional area of higher education administration. This study, anchored in the complementary theoretical perspectives of ANT and phenomenology, offers a sophisticated deconstruction of university outreach. It portrays outreach not as a static institutional function but as a vibrant, co-constituted network where human intentions, material artifacts, policies, and relationships constantly interact, translate, and inscribe meaning. The intricate descriptions provided illuminate the significant role of administration in articulating and reinforcing the value of outreach, while simultaneously highlighting the lived experience of faculty and other actors navigating this complex terrain.

In conclusion, this study provides higher education administration with a deeper understanding of the lived experience and structural dynamics of community university outreach,

enabling administrators to address challenges related to strategic alignment, resource allocation, communication efficacy, public perception, faculty engagement, and organizational structure, ultimately strengthening the institution's ability to fulfill and demonstrate its mission.

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Appendix

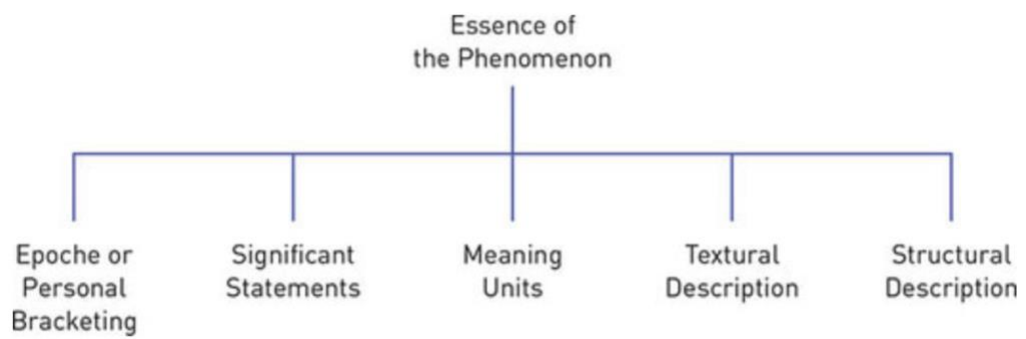
Appendix A: Coding Template

Appendix B: Document Analysis Guide

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Appendix D: Email Invitation to Informational Interview

Appendix A – Coding Template



Appendix B — Document Analysis Guide

To guide the analysis of documents collected from university webpages, I was guided by Guba and Lincoln (1981, pp. 238–239), citing Clark (1967), list the questions about the authenticity of documents (as cited by Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 176-177):

- ✓ What is the history of the document?
 - How did it come into my hands?
 - What guarantee is there that it is what it pretends to be?
- ✓ Is the document complete, as originally constructed?
 - Has it been tampered with or edited?
- ✓ If the document is genuine, under what circumstances and for what purposes was it produced?
 - Who was/is the author?
- ✓ What was trying to [be accomplished]?
 - For whom was the document intended?
- ✓ What were the maker's sources of information?
 - Does the document represent an eyewitness account, a secondhand account, a reconstruction of an event long prior to the writing, an interpretation?
- ✓ What was or is the maker's bias?
 - To what extent was the writer likely to want to tell the truth?
- ✓ Do other documents exist that might shed additional light on the same story, event, project, program, context?
 - If so, are they available, accessible? Who holds them?

Additionally, I incorporate Merriam & Tisdell's advice, to determine whether documents are primary or secondary sources (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 178). They suggest approaching designating the two source types as:

- ✓ Primary sources: the originator of the document is recounting firsthand experience with the phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 178).
- ✓ Secondary sources: reports of a phenomenon of interest by those who have not directly experienced the phenomenon;
 - these are often compiled later and are “at least one step removed” from the initial account (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p. 7 as cited by Merriam & Tisdell, p. 178).

In the coding template, responses to these questions were categorized under textual description.

Appendix C — Interview Questions (9 total)

- Experiences and Involvement in University Outreach
 1. How do you perceive the messaging and communication of university outreach initiatives within your institution? What are your thoughts on how outreach activities are adequately emphasized and recognized?
 2. Share a specific instance where you felt your outreach efforts were well-communicated and recognized by your department or university. Detail the outcomes of the recognition and how it influenced your motivation and engagement with outreach activities.
- Communication of University Outreach
 3. Reflect with me on any instances where you felt your outreach activities were not adequately recognized or communicated by your department or institution, and what obstacles contributed to the lack of acknowledgement.
 4. What channels and methods are used to communicate university outreach initiatives to university outreach personnel? Which specific messaging strategies stand out to you?
- Framing of Outreach as a Growth Activity
 5. How do you believe university outreach contributes to the mission and goals of higher education institutions? In your opinion, what role does outreach play in creating a positive impact on society?
 6. Share a story or experience with me where your outreach activities directly benefited students, the community, or a partnership with an organization. Emphasize the tangible outcomes of the engagement.
 7. What suggestions or recommendations do you have for improving the communication and messaging of university outreach initiatives? How can institutions better support and incentivize university outreach personnel' involvement in outreach activities?
- Motivations, Goals, and Benefits of University Outreach
 8. How would you define university outreach in the context of your academic role and responsibilities?
 9. Let us talk about how your personal values influence your decision to participate in outreach activities. How do your values intersect with the mission, vision, or strategic plan of your department or institution in fostering communication connections?

In the coding template, informant responses to these questions were categorized under significant statements or meaning units.

Help With Dissertation Research on University Outreach

I hope this message finds you amid an enjoyable day! My name is Clarissa Beavers, PhD candidate in the administration of higher education at Auburn University.

I wanted to get in touch because I am piloting a study about the choices made by university outreach personnel regarding outreach messaging they have delivered/will deliver and how they have engaged/will engage the community at large.

In my capacity as an interested party in the vital job that the center does, in general I would like to know:

- Which methods are best for informing the public and external partners about CCEL programs and initiatives?
- To what degree is the center evaluating the current communication and outreach efforts? Please share how much importance you assign to statistics and comments.
- Does the office face any challenges or considerations when attempting to strike a balance between broad, audience-facing communications and more targeted, relationship-building strategies?

Your advice would be much appreciated. Understanding how you convey the important nature of the work done by the Center for Community-Engaged Learning at Mississippi State University will advance the direction of my research.

Your thoughts on the above would be welcome in a 30- to 45- minute phone or Zoom call on a Tuesday or Thursday this month. In the event you are unavailable for either, your written responses will be equally valuable.

Thank you for your consideration. Your reply is much anticipated.

Much appreciated.

