Original Research

University-Community Engagement from the Perspective of the University Populace: A Case Study of a Canadian University

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Abstract

Researchers have long supported increased engagement between institutions of higher learning and the communities that exist beyond campuses. It has been suggested that universities, especially metropolitan core ones, can benefit from making concerted efforts to engage with surrounding communities in meaningful ways. Examining the efforts universities make to better engage with the community will help to inform future practice and hopefully lead to greater success and prevalence of university-community engagement. To that end, this study examined university-community engagement from the perspective of various constituencies that make up a university's populace (e.g., students, faculty). Specifically, using a descriptive exploratory case study design, this research examined students, faculty, staff, and administrators' perceptions regarding university-community engagement and awareness of community learning programs at one Canadian university, a decade after a university wide community engagement policy was instituted. Data was collected using an online survey which was completed by a self-selecting sample of participants from the university populace. The results expand on existing literature by providing perspective from the internal university populace regarding university-community engagement efforts. Furthermore, the study results provide insight into the awareness of and support for university-community engagement efforts among various university constituencies.

Keywords: community learning, higher education, descriptive research, policy, community partnerships

Introduction

It has become increasingly common and important for universities to enhance their presence and dedication to the communities they are in or interact with (Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Kagan & Diamond, 2019; Maurrasse, 2001). To that end, many universities have increased their focus on providing institutional backing for community partnership establishment and expansion, as well as community-relevant forms of scholarship (Barker, 2004; Brisbin & Hunter, 2003; Glazier et al., 2020; Sasson, 2019; Taylor & Ballard, 2020). In Canada, universities have not been excluded from this trend, and many Canadian universities have developed policies and strategies to improve their community footprint and connections. However, developing, growing, and improving relationships between institutions of higher education and the community has not happened overnight and in some cases has been a struggle. This is likely due to the perception that for far too long "universities were seen as spatially and culturally disconnected and politically disengaged from the needs and concerns of the communities that surround them" (Allahwala et al., 2013, p.43), and consequently communities often felt unwelcome by universities and were uninterested in trying to develop mutually beneficial connections with universities (Hart et al., 2007; Strand et al., 2003). Yet, for those higher education institutions willing to make concerted efforts to break down these barriers and engage with surrounding communities in more meaningful ways, the documented benefits (Alday-Bersoto, 2019; Collins et al., 2007; Glazier et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2018; Onwuemele, 2018) can be immense.

The University of Winnipeg is a Canadian university that over the past decade often characterized itself as being just such an institution (i.e., a university that has a strong focus on engaging with the community). In fact, to help ensure university-community engagement was a clear part of the University of Winnipeg's identity, the university developed what it referred to as a "community learning policy" in 2009. However, having a dedicated policy on community engagement does not guarantee that community engagement efforts are being made and recognized. Therefore, the overall intent of this descriptive study was to examine awareness and perceptions of this specific institution's community engagement efforts over the past decade since that policy was created, as seen through the eyes of those within the university community, including students, staff, faculty, and administration.

Background

In 2008, the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (now Universities Canada) released a report that provided insight into university research engagement and knowledge mobilization and offered universities evidence-based strategies for future growth in these areas. In this report, it was stated that:

> Community partnerships help universities to define and scope the research
> questions and provide access to research partnerships and sources of local

expertise, as well as additional funding and in-kind contributions. In turn, universities provide communities with access to wide-ranging and in-depth knowledge and national and international expertise that informs and addresses community challenges and opportunities in a meaningful way. (p. 84)

This suggestion came at a time when the major Canadian Federal Government research grant and scholarship funding organizations (Tri-Council – NSERC; SSHRC; CIHR) were putting added emphasis on the importance of knowledge dissemination and community awareness. Moreover, this document was released during the 2008 global financial crisis, when public funding for Canadian universities had already been in decline for more than a decade (Canadian Association for University Teachers, 2009). Consequently, many Canadian institutions were looking for ways to secure other sources of financial support. Hence, this idea of increased community engagement offering "additional funding and in-kind contributions" was of great interest to many Canadian universities.

Academics encouraged an increase in community engagement by universities for many years, especially at academic institutions located in urban centers. Specifically, researchers argued that building partnerships between institutions of higher learning and community partners located in marginalized metropolitan core communities can be a sound strategy for generating ongoing opportunities for scholarship that meets the social, financial, civic, and educational needs of the community (Cohen & Yapa, 2003), and for teaching social justice (Merrett, 2000). Add to this the financial crisis of 2008, and it may not have been a coincidence that less than a year after the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada released the aforementioned report, the University of Winnipeg developed and released a policy document specifically focused on engaging the community (Axworthy, 2009).

The document that was released by the University of Winnipeg discussed the increasing literature supporting university-community engagement, as well as the social, economic, and cultural need for the University of Winnipeg to presently increase its focus on community learning and engagement. The document identified existing community learning programs that the university was offering and also highlighted community populations with which the university believed it was presently engaging and/or with which it needed to improve engagement. Several of the community populations emphasized in the document, including Indigenous, new immigrant, and at-risk youth populations, were clearly influenced by the surrounding neighborhood and metropolitan core location of the University of Winnipeg. The identified purposes of the policy document were:

First, to demonstrate that the various initiatives undertaken thus far can be given a shared framework and to illustrate that their combined results set the stage for redefining the role of the university and its relations with the broader world it serves. And, second, to generate a discussion on how to prioritize the issue of community learning as a central pillar of post-secondary education in the 21st

century, and to examine how we – faculty, staff, students and community
members alike – can advance this enhanced mandate. (p.3)

Creating and publicly sharing a policy document indicated a strong awareness and appreciation by the university of the many voices advocating for increased university-community engagement. Furthermore, it demonstrated a level of dedication to improving the University of Winnipeg's community footprint through what the document identified as "community learning." However, developing a policy regarding anything is only valuable if it leads to desired actions and outcomes.

There are many ways that a university could approach taking action to better engage the community, and as noted in the policy document developed by the University of Winnipeg (2009) there is no one universal model that fits all. Since the University released its policy document on university-community engagement, the institution has taken various actions to expand its community engagement. Some of these actions, such as providing internal funding and/or support for faculty to engage the community more with their research (e.g., involving community research partners; community focused dissemination), were strictly geared towards specific members of the University of Winnipeg populace (i.e., faculty). However, the most notable actions were increased overall rhetoric from senior university administration regarding university-community engagement and an increased focus on what the University of Winnipeg referred to as Community Learning Programs (CLPs), specifically development of additional CLPs (e.g., e.g., community charter for access to campus recreation facilities; international education programs), as well as increased promotion and support for existing ones (e.g., a global welcome centre; inner-city youth sports programs & camps; indigenous learning centre). These actions were geared towards encouraging all members of the university populace (i.e., students, faculty, staff, and administration) to have greater engagement with the community (Axworthy, 2009). But have these actions worked?

Purpose

Assessing awareness and perceptions of university-community engagement efforts is a valuable method to help institutions understand where such initiatives stand and where future efforts related to community engagement may need to be focused. To that end, a considerable amount of research has been completed with respect to community perceptions regarding universities' engagement efforts (e.g., Bruning et al., 2006; Hart & Northmore, 2011). Yet, research specifically focussing on insight from those individuals functioning within academic institutions and how various groupings of these individuals (e.g., faculty, staff, students) may differ from one another in their perceptions of an institution's community engagement has received less attention. However, examining the various populations within a university and their awareness of community engagement programs and perceptions regarding overall institutional community

engagement has the potential to help universities understand the reach and effectiveness of their community engagement actions.

Therefore, the present descriptive case study was designed to investigate and compare the knowledge and perceptions of one specific university's various population groupings (i.e., students, faculty, staff, administration at the University of Winnipeg), henceforth referred to as "constituencies," concerning that university's overall community engagement and the specific CLPs the university offers as part of its community engagement efforts since implementing a community engagement policy a decade earlier. Specifically, this study sought to provide insight into the following four key areas of interest:

a) the perceptions among various university constituencies of the University of Winnipeg's present engagement with and overall commitment to its "community learning policy";
b) the extent to which specific the University of Winnipeg constituencies are aware of and promote the University of Winnipeg's specific CLPs;
c) the perceptions of various University of Winnipeg constituencies with respect to which specifically identified community groups (e.g., Indigenous; immigrant and newcomer; LGBTQIA+) are being targeted through the university's CLPs, and beliefs about the extent to which community groupings are aware of the university's CLPs; and
d) the perceptions of various University of Winnipeg constituencies about the value of university-community engagement

Methods

Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

This study followed a descriptive exploratory study design (Mark, 1996; Singh, 2007) and involved data collection over a seven-month timespan. Studies of this nature are commonly used when little is known about a particular phenomenon (Burns & Grove, 2005; Singh, 2007), which was the case here. The university Human Research Ethics Board approved this study prior to any data collection. All University of Winnipeg students, faculty, staff, and administration were eligible to participate. To recruit participants for the study, university-wide communication blasts via email, PowerPoint slides that course instructors shared at the start or end of lectures, the University of Winnipeg website and social media accounts, and word of mouth were all utilized. Potential participants were informed about the nature of the study and provided a link to a website containing a detailed letter of information and corresponding consent form, as well as the actual questionnaire. Participants were free to complete the questionnaire on their own time and were provided with contact information should they have any questions or concerns.

Following the guidelines offered by Andrews and colleagues (2003), a 22-item online survey that was specifically created for this research, was used to collect descriptive cross-sectional data. Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the intent to collect data from all the various University of Winnipeg constituencies at the same time, the use of a cross-sectional online survey to collect data was deemed appropriate (Wyatt, 2000). Eight of the items on the questionnaire were demographic in nature, for example: age, gender, and primary university status (i.e., which of the following did the participant see as their primary role on campus — student; faculty; staff; administrator). The remaining items on the survey dealt with the study's four key areas of interest described earlier. The survey used almost all closed response questions which included both rating scales and select all that apply options. One open ended question was also included at the end of the survey to seek additional input or comments. Participants had the option to skip any questions they were not comfortable answering. The survey took participants approximately nine minutes to complete and was completely anonymous.

Given the descriptive focus of this study, content validity for the questionnaire was established by having a proficient online questionnaire developer and a university-community engagement expert scrutinize the questionnaire. Following these examinations of the instrument, minor alterations were completed to help ensure the information being sought would be attained. Subsequently, as a means of establishing greater face validity, the questionnaire was piloted with a group of individuals from the University of Winnipeg and a group discussion with these individuals was conducted to confirm clear wording of items on the questionnaire and that what the items were focused on was readily apparent to the group. A couple of items on the questionnaire were reworded based on this piloting process. As Ayers and Housner (2008) have suggested, "validity is not applied to an instrument, but to the inferences about scores and the interpretation and application of actions based on those scores" (p. 55). The data collected for the present research was completely descriptive in nature and was not intended to study cause and effect. Consequently, validity measures beyond what have been described were not essential.

Participants

The University of Winnipeg populace was composed of approximately 450 staff/administration, 600 faculty members, and a student body of around 9000 students at the time of the study. The survey was completed by 274 members of the University of Winnipeg populace (undergraduate students=87; post baccalaureate/graduate students=7; faculty=85; staff=88; admin=7) and the distribution was 69% female, 30% male, and 1% other. Participants varied in how long they had been a member of the university populace with 31 participants having been a member of the University for less than a year, 47 participants having been a member for twelve or more years, and the rest being very evenly distributed somewhere between those extremes. Among the students who participated in the study, first year students to students who had been attending the university for more than five years completed the survey, with the majority (45%) of student responses coming from those identifying as second or third-year students.
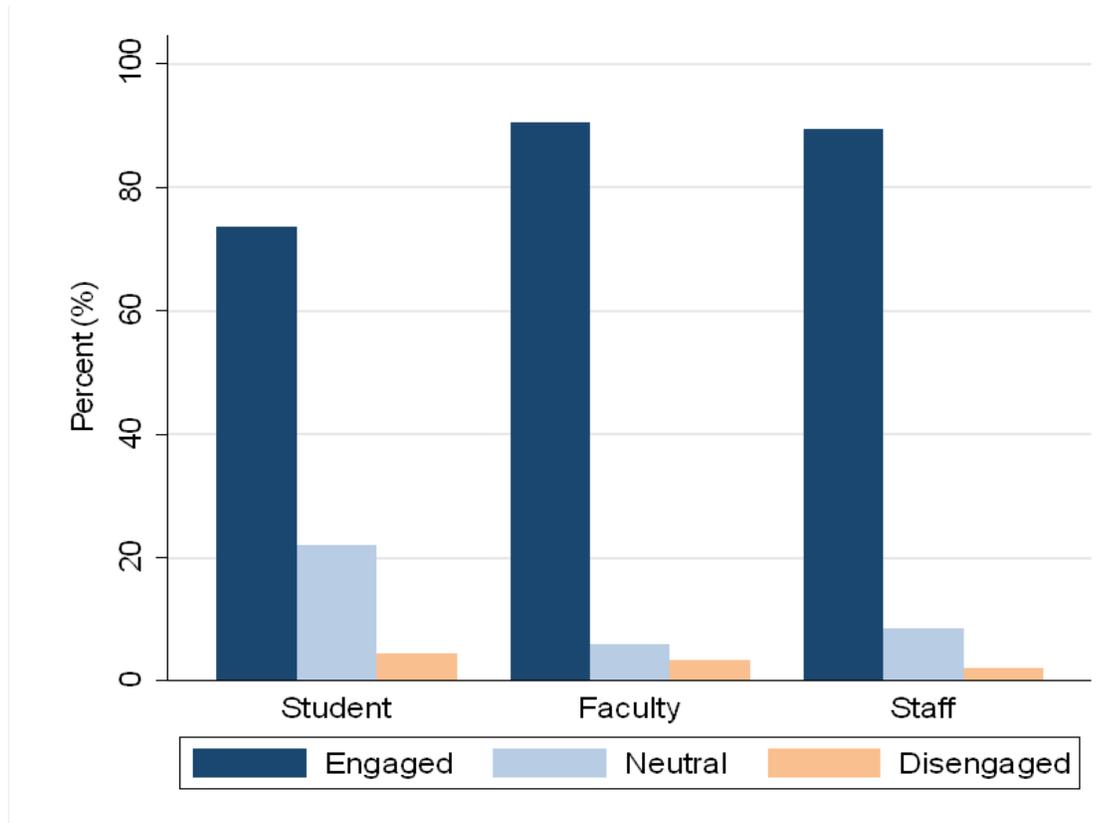
Data Analysis

Once the data were collected, descriptive statistics were completed along with chi-square and/or Fisher's exact tests to examine relationships among variables and responses to the various survey questions (Vieira Jr., 2017). Beyond providing descriptive information, several of the specific independent variables (e.g., age, gender, university department) were not examined as they did not relate to the specific purposes and defined research questions of the present study. As a result, the independent variable most focused on for this study was participant's self-identified primary status at the university (i.e., undergraduate student; post baccalaureate or graduate student; faculty; staff; or administrator). The reason for focusing on this particular variable was strictly connected to its central importance in examining the four key areas of interest identified in the study. Some of the categories within this variable needed to be grouped together for data analysis due to small sample sizes. Thus, undergraduate students and post baccalaureate/graduate students were grouped together and referred to as "students" in all analyses, and similarly staff and administration were grouped together and referred to as "constituencies" for all analyses. The data analyses were completed using SPSS.

Results

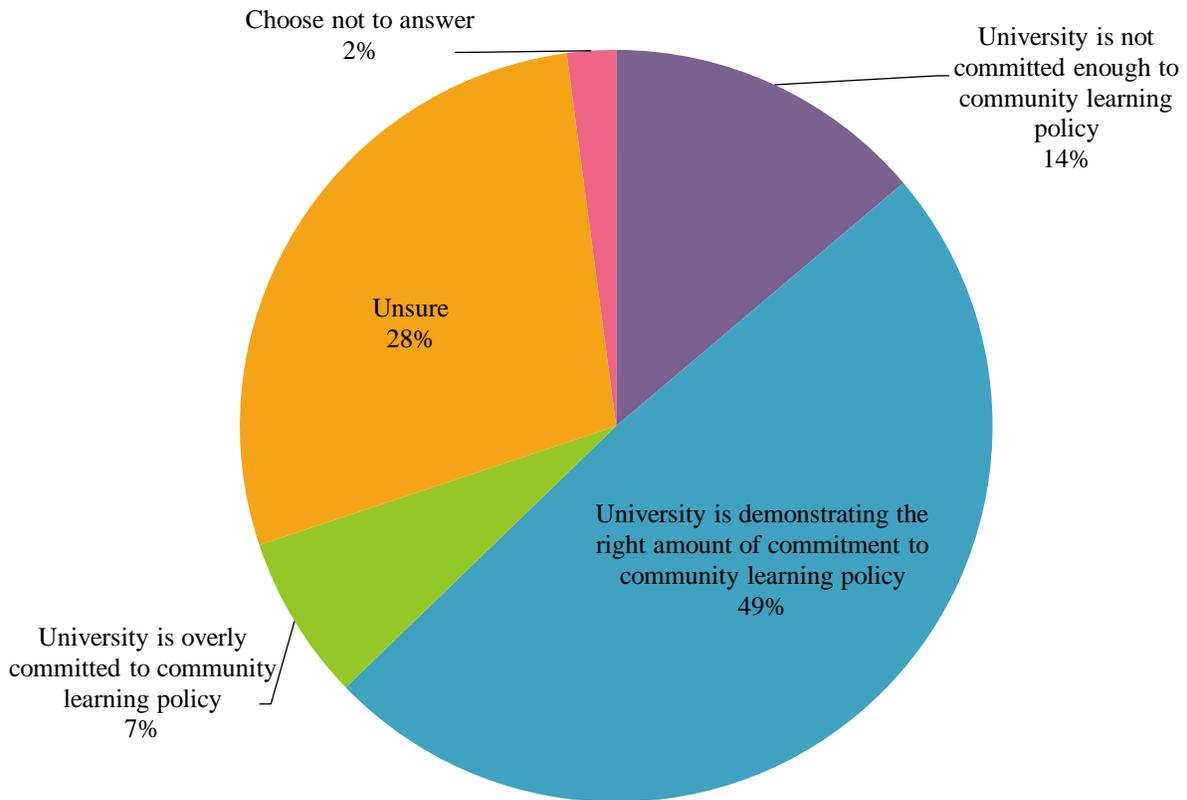Perceptions Regarding Engagement and Commitment to Community Learning Policy

The first set of questions to be analyzed were all related to the perceptions among various University of Winnipeg constituencies regarding present engagement and overall commitment by the university to its community learning policy. The first survey question related to this topic asked respondents, on a scale of 1-5 (1=extremely disengaged; 3=neutral; 5=extremely engaged), to what extent they believed that the University of Winnipeg was actively engaged in a community learning policy? It was found that 84% of the participants who answered this question believed that University was somewhat or extremely engaged in a community learning policy, 12% believed the university to be neutral, and 4% felt that the university was somewhat or extremely disengaged. As can be seen in Figure 1, about 90% of faculty members and staff/administration were found to believe that the University was somewhat or extremely engaged in a community learning policy, while a lower proportion of students (74%) indicated this same level of engagement. The difference in these proportions was found to be statistically significant (p=0.008).

Figure 1. Perceptions regarding university engagement in a community learning policy

A second survey question in this vein sought to examine participant's impressions regarding the University of Winnipeg's commitment to its community learning policy. Respondents had an option of four answers to this question (1=University is not committed enough to community learning policy; 2=University is demonstrating the right amount of commitment to community learning policy; 3=University is overly committed to community learning policy; and 4=Unsure). The results indicated that almost half of the overall sample (49%) believed that the University demonstrated the right amount of commitment to its community learning policy (see Figure 2). However, it should be noted that many participants suggested they were unsure about the University of Winnipeg's commitment level to community learning policy (28%). This statistic was driven mostly by the significantly higher percentage of students, in comparison to faculty or staff/administration counterparts, indicating that they were unsure ($p<.01$).

Figure 2. Perceptions regarding university commitment to community learning policy

The final survey question related to this topic asked study participants to indicate, on a scale of 1-5 (1=extremely unsuccessful; 3=neutral; 5=extremely successful), the degree to which they believed the University of Winnipeg was succeeding in its community learning policy? Results illustrated that 70% of participants believed the university has been somewhat or extremely successful with its community learning policy, 24% were neutral, and 6% believed it to be somewhat or extremely unsuccessful (3% chose not to answer). No significant differences were found between the various University of Winnipeg constituencies and their perceptions regarding the university's success in meeting its community learning policy.

Personal Awareness and Promotion of Specific University of Winnipeg CLPs

Another key area of interest for this present research was to better understand the pervasiveness of the University of Winnipeg's specific CLP's among the various university constituencies. To that end, one of the survey questions asked participants to identify, from a provided list, which of

the University of Winnipeg programs/centres/initiatives etc. related to university-community engagement they have heard of. Respondents could check all that apply (see Figure 3). Some of the best known programs were those specifically geared towards the indigenous community (e.g., Aboriginal Student Services Center, Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Center). Also, community learning programs mainly geared towards international students were well known, including International Student Services, the Global Welcome Center, and the English Language Program. However, it must also be noted that more than half of the study participants were unaware of over 50% of the CLP's that were being offered (see Figure 5). On average, students were the constituency least aware of most community engagement programs offered by the University, and the staff/admin were the most aware of every program with the exception of the Campus Climate for LGBTQ Students program and the Writing Program/Tutoring Centre, of which the faculty were most aware of (see Table 1).

Figure 3*. Percentages of participants that heard of specific University of Winnipeg CLPs*
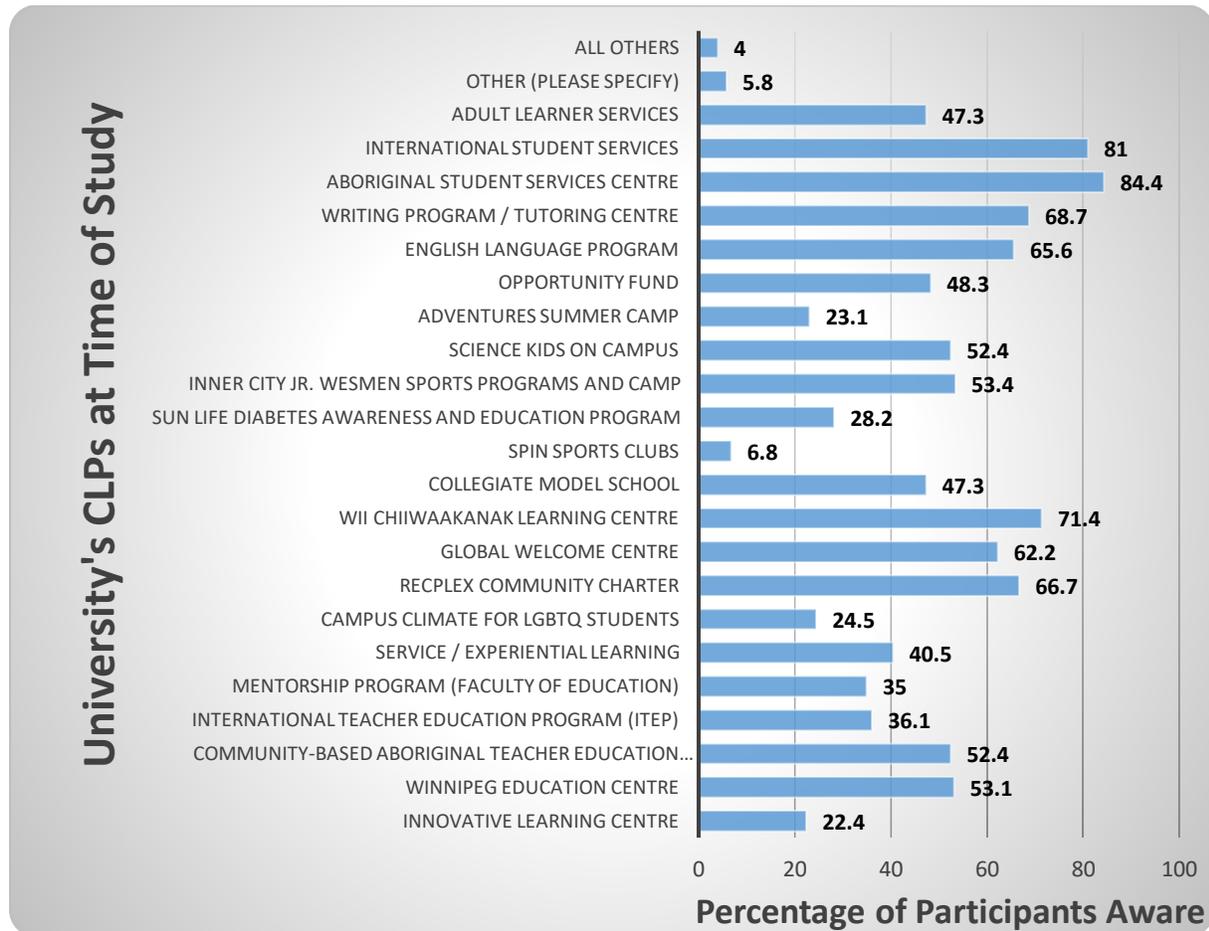
Table 1. Association between constituencies and awareness of specific University CLP's

University of Winnipeg Specific CLP's	University of Winnipeg Constituency			
	Student N=94 n (%)	Faculty N=85 n (%)	Staff/Admin N=95 n (%)	p
Innovative Learning Centre	8 (8.5)	22 (25.9)	30 (31.6)	<0.001*
Winnipeg Education Centre	33 (35.1)	49 (57.7)	61 (64.2)	<0.001*
Community-Based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP)	35 (37.2)	46 (54.1)	62 (65.3)	0.001*
International Teacher Education Program (ITEP)	27 (28.7)	35 (41.2)	39 (41.1)	0.131
Mentorship Program (Faculty of Education)	38 (40.4)	28 (32.9)	33 (34.7)	0.547
Service/Experiential Learning	15 (16.0)	44 (51.8)	52 (54.7)	<0.001*
Campus Climate for LGBTQ Students	19 (20.2)	27 (31.8)	24 (25.3)	0.208
RecPlex Community Charter	53 (56.4)	56 (65.9)	75 (79.0)	0.004*
Global Welcome Centre	32 (34.0)	52 (61.2)	88 (92.6)	<0.001*
Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre	39 (41.5)	65 (76.5)	93 (97.9)	<0.001*
Collegiate Model School	14 (14.9)	44 (51.8)	70 (73.7)	<0.001*
SPIN Sports Club	5 (5.3)	4 (4.7)	8 (8.4)	0.605
Sun Life Diabetes Awareness and Education Program	26 (27.7)	19 (22.4)	33 (34.7)	0.180
Inner City Jr. Wesmen Sports Programs and Camp	42 (44.7)	46 (54.1)	59 (62.1)	0.056
Science Kids on Campus	25 (26.6)	50 (58.8)	70 (73.7)	<0.001*
Adventures Summer Camp	13 (13.8)	16 (18.8)	36 (37.9)	<0.001*
Opportunity Fund	14 (14.9)	44 (51.8)	77 (81.1)	<0.001*
English Language Program	39 (41.5)	55 (64.7)	86 (90.5)	<0.001*
Writing Program / Tutoring Centre	60 (63.8)	64 (75.3)	66 (69.5)	0.251
Aboriginal Student Services Centre	67 (71.3)	72 (84.7)	93 (97.9)	<0.001*
International Student Services	66 (70.2)	67 (78.8)	90 (94.7)	<0.001*
Adult Learner Services	45 (47.9)	25 (29.4)	61 (64.2)	<0.001*

* To control for Type I Error, P values of ≤ .01 were considered significant

It was not only deemed useful to establish just how well known the University of Winnipeg's CLPs were amongst its populace, but also whether various constituencies ever promoted these programs by personally recommending specific CLPs to others. Consequently, one of the survey questions asked participants to identify, from a provided list, which of the University of Winnipeg programs/centres/ initiatives etc. related to university-community engagement, if any,

have they ever recommended to others? Respondents could check all that applied. Overall, the staff/administration constituency was the most likely to recommend the university's CLPs, and had the largest percentage of recommenders for all but five of the programs, while the faculty constituency had the largest percentage of recommenders (see Table 2).

Table 2. Association between constituencies and recommendations to others regarding the University of Winnipeg's CLPs

| University of Winnipeg Specific CLP's | University of Winnipeg Constituency | | | p |
	Student N=94 n (%)	Faculty N=85 n (%)	Staff/Admin N=95 n (%)	
Innovative Learning Centre	0 (0.0)	5 (5.9)	4 (4.2)	0.046
Winnipeg Education Centre	4 (4.3)	12 (14.1)	13 (13.7)	0.037
Community-Based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP)	2 (2.1)	14 (16.5)	12 (12.6)	0.002*
International Teacher Education Program (ITEP)	6 (6.4)	12 (14.1)	9 (9.5)	0.220
Mentorship Program (Faculty of Education)	7 (7.5)	5 (5.9)	8 (8.4)	0.806
Service/Experiential Learning	2 (2.1)	13 (15.3)	17 (17.9)	<0.001*
Campus Climate for LGBTQ Students	2 (2.1)	1 (1.2)	10 (10.5)	0.008*
RecPlex Community Charter	21 (22.3)	13 (15.3)	29 (30.5)	0.052
Global Welcome Centre	8 (8.5)	14 (16.5)	34 (35.8)	<0.001*
Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre	4 (4.3)	13 (15.3)	32 (33.7)	<0.001*
Collegiate Model School	0 (0.0)	5 (5.9)	18 (19.0)	<0.001*
SPIN Sports Club	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.1)	0.776
Sun Life Diabetes Awareness and Education Program	4 (4.3)	2 (2.4)	4 (4.2)	0.782
Inner City Jr. Wesmen Sports Programs and Camp	6 (6.4)	8 (9.4)	8 (8.4)	0.746
Science Kids on Campus	3 (3.2)	5 (5.9)	15 (15.8)	0.006*
Adventures Summer Camp	4 (4.3)	3 (3.5)	11 (11.6)	0.068
Opportunity Fund	1 (1.1)	12 (14.1)	21 (22.1)	<0.001*
English Language Program	8 (8.5)	17 (20.0)	42 (44.2)	<0.001*
Writing Program / Tutoring Centre	31 (33.0)	56 (65.9)	44 (46.3)	<0.001*
Aboriginal Student Services Centre	13 (13.8)	28 (32.9)	53 (55.8)	<0.001*
International Student Services	12 (12.8)	21 (24.7)	49 (51.6)	<0.001*
Adult Learner Services	4 (4.3)	7 (8.2)	27 (28.4)	<0.001*
Other	1 (1.1)	6 (7.1)	7 (7.4)	0.060

* To control for Type I Error, P values of ≤ .01 were considered significant

Perceptions about Community Groups being Targeted and Awareness of The University of Winnipeg's CLPs

Another of the four key areas of interest in the present study was gaining insight from the University of Winnipeg's various constituencies about the community groups (e.g., Indigenous; new comer/immigrant; LGBTQIA+) they believe are being targeted through the university's CLPs, and the extent to which they believe specific community groupings are aware of the university's CLPs. Therefore, one of the survey questions asked participants to identify, from a provided list, which populations were being targeted through the University of Winnipeg's CLPs. Respondents could check all that applied. The findings indicated that Indigenous, immigrant and newcomer, and urban core populations led the way (see Figure 4). The proportion of student respondents who believed that each community population group was being targeted as part of the university's CLPs was often significantly lower when compared to the faculty and staff/administration constituencies (see Table 3).

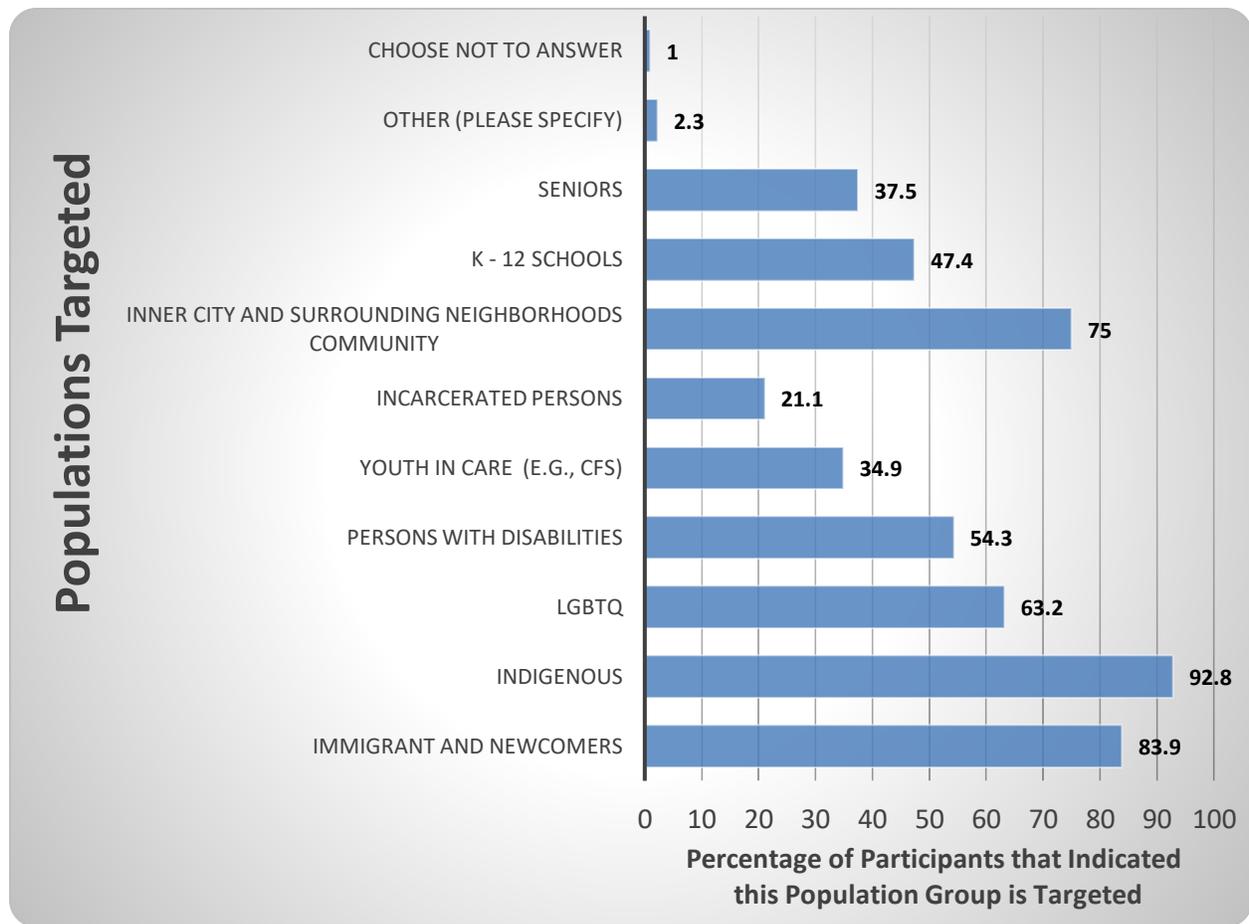*Figure 4.* Perceptions of which community populations are targeted through the University of Winnipeg's CLPs
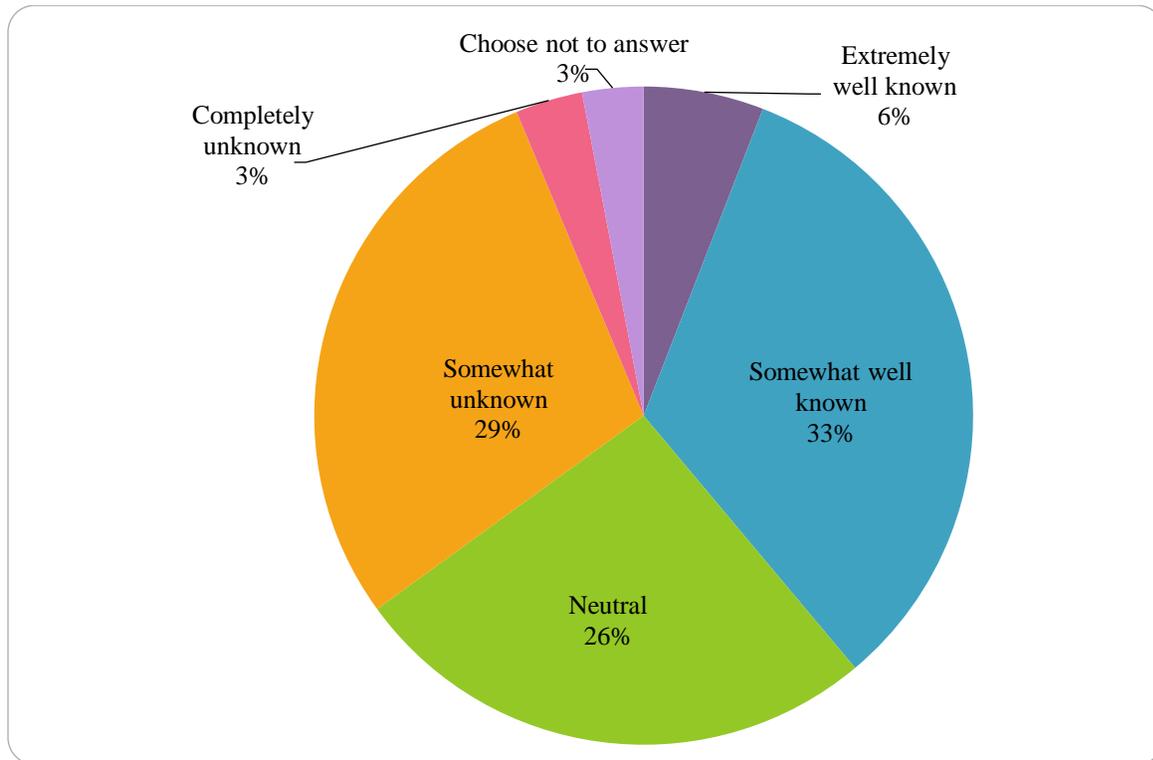
Table 3. Association between constituencies and responses regarding the University of Winnipeg's targeting of specific populations through CLPs

Community Populations Targeted	University of Winnipeg Constituency			p
	Student N=94 n (%)	Faculty N=85 n (%)	Staff/Admin N=95 n (%)	
Immigrant and Newcomers	68 (72.3)	74 (87.1)	89 (93.7)	<0.001*
Indigenous	80 (85.1)	82 (96.5)	94 (99.0)	<0.001*
LGBTQIA+	63 (67.0)	48 (56.5)	63 (66.3)	0.267
Persons with Disabilities	56 (59.6)	36 (42.4)	58 (61.1)	0.022
Youth in Care (e.g. CFS)	22 (23.4)	28 (32.9)	49 (51.6)	<0.001*
Incarcerated Persons	3 (3.2)	22 (25.9)	33 (34.7)	<0.001*
Urban Core & Surrounding Neighborhoods	58 (61.7)	71 (83.5)	80 (84.1)	<0.001*
K-12 Schools	23 (24.5)	45 (52.9)	63 (66.3)	<0.001*
Seniors	21 (22.3)	38 (44.7)	46 (48.4)	<0.001*

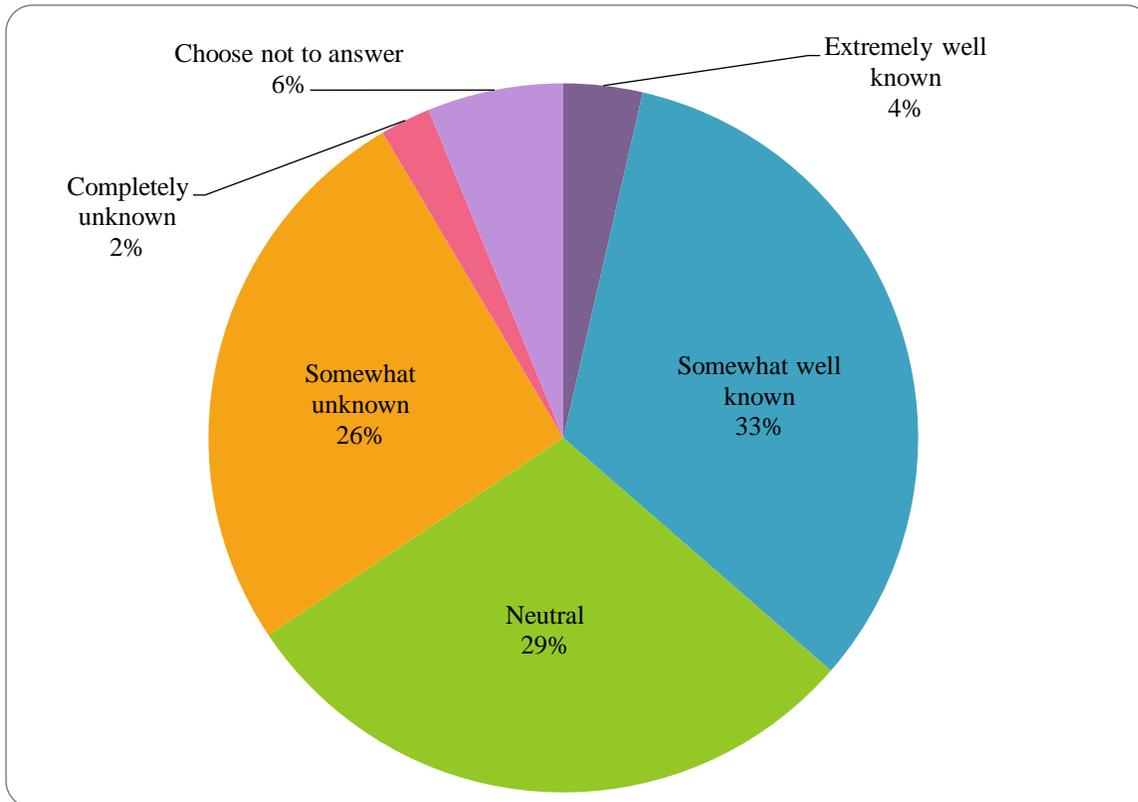** To control for Type I Error, P values of ≤ .01 were considered significant*

Two questions in the survey were designed to provide insight into the respondents' beliefs about community awareness of the CLPs offered by the University of Winnipeg. The first of these questions asked participants to indicate, on a scale of 1-5 (1=completely unknown; 3=neutral; 5=extremely well known), how well known do they believe the university's CLPs are among the general city and surrounding area population. Very few participants believed the CLPs at the University were completely unknown (3%) or extremely well known (6%) to the city and surrounding area populations (see Figure 5). Further analysis (i.e., chi-square and Fisher's exact tests) demonstrated no significant differences existed between the various self-identified status constituencies (i.e., students; faculty; staff/admin) at the university regarding perceived community awareness.

The second survey item providing insight regarding respondent's beliefs about community awareness of the CLPs offered by the University of Winnipeg asked participants to indicate, on a scale of 1-5 (1=completely unknown; 3=neutral; 5=extremely well known), how well known they believe the university's CLPs are among communities which are traditionally underrepresented at Canadian universities (e.g., LGBTQIA+; immigrants and newcomers; Indigenous; persons with disabilities; individuals from low socioeconomic status neighbourhoods)? Very few members of the University of Winnipeg populace believed the university's CLPs were completely unknown (2%) or extremely well known (4%) to traditionally underrepresented populations (see Figure 6). Once again, further analysis demonstrated no significant differences existed between the various self-identified status constituencies (i.e., students; faculty; staff/admin) at the university regarding perceived community awareness. However, a trend did exist in which students, on average, were less likely than their faculty or staff/administration counterparts to believe that CLPs offered by the university were somewhat or extremely well known.

Figure 6. Participant opinions about whether or not the university's CLPs are well-known among traditionally underrepresented communities

Perceived Value of Community Engagement

The final key area of interest in the present study was gaining insight from the various constituencies at the University of Winnipeg regarding the perceived value of university-community engagement. Two items on the survey were focused on this area of interest. The first of these asked participants how important they felt community engagement was for a university? Respondents had an option of four answers to this question (1= Somewhat/Extremely Unimportant; 2=Neutral; 3= Somewhat/Extremely Important; and 4=Unsure). The second of these items required respondents to provide their opinion on the statement "having CLPs at a university help support academic excellence/achievement". Respondents had an option of four responses (1= Somewhat/Completely Disagree; 2=Neutral; 3= Somewhat/Completely Agree; and 4=Unsure). The results from these two survey items revealed that the majority of participants believed community engagement is important for a university (91%) and that having CLPs supports academic excellence/achievement (77%). Yet it should also be noted that students were significantly less likely than both faculty and staff/administration to believe community engagement is important to a university (see Table 4).

Table 4. Associations between constituencies and responses to value of community engagement survey items

	University of Winnipeg Constituency			
	Student N=93 n (%)	Faculty N=84 n (%)	Staff/Admin N=95 n (%)	p
How important is community engagement for a university				
Somewhat/Extremely Important	77 (83.7)	78 (92.8)	92 (96.8)	0.003*
Neutral	13 (14.1)	2 (2.4)	2 (1.2)	
Somewhat/Extremely Unimportant	2 (2.2)	3 (3.6)	1 (1.0)	
Unsure	0 (0.0)	1 (1.2)	0 (0.0)	
CLPs support academic excellence/achievement				
Somewhat/Completely Agree	74 (79.6)	61 (72.6)	75 (79.0)	0.117
Neutral	15 (16.1)	10 (11.9)	15 (15.8)	
Somewhat/Completely Disagree	3 (3.2)	9 (10.7)	5 (5.2)	
Unsure	1 (1.1)	4 (4.8)	0 (0.0)	

To control for Type I Error, P values of ≤ .01 were considered significant

Discussion

The university focused on in this study has put considerable effort into creating the image of an academic institution dedicated to community engagement. This includes the creation of a community learning policy, and the development of many CLPs designed to serve and/or increase university engagement with various community populations. The existing literature supports such efforts and has recognized some of the benefits to university-community engagement (Alday-Bersoto, 2019; Glazier et al., 2020; Sasson, 2019; Taylor & Ballard, 2020), and also supports assessment of such efforts (Holton, 2015). However, to date, little has been documented which specifically examined the support for and perceptions of such efforts by the various internal constituencies which make up a university populace. The results from the present study help to provide additional insight to this specific line of inquiry.

The present study found that the large majority of the University of Winnipeg populace surveyed believed that not only is overall university-community engagement important but having dedicated CLPs at a university supports academic excellence/achievement. The fact that students were significantly less likely to perceive university-community engagement as important can likely be attributed to the fact that administration and staff at the University are more likely to be

the ones developing, leading, and advocating for the various community engagement initiatives. Regardless, the overall importance seen in community engagement identified by the University of Winnipeg constituencies suggests that this sample of the university population is in agreement with the literature advocating for concerted university-community engagement (Muirhead & Woolcock, 2008). Obviously, this would be a positive finding for any university that has developed a policy supporting community engagement and actively promotes itself as being engaged with the community. That is, if a university wants to be engaged with the community it will likely find this easier to accomplish if the members within the university see such engagement as valuable. Yet, a question that does arise from this finding is whether or not the University of Winnipeg populace supported community engagement to this extent before the university developed a policy, or is the perceived value placed on university-community engagement by the university populace thanks in part to the development of such a policy and the institution wide increase in promotion of community engagement that followed its release? Future research should try to examine the specific impact that implementing an institutional policy on university-community engagement has on the perspectives of a university's populace with regards to the importance of community engagement.

Armed with the understanding that the University of Winnipeg populace surveyed seemed to support the general idea of university-community engagement, the next question to examine was "what does the university populace think about the university's efforts to engage the community?" The findings from the present study demonstrated that the majority of the university populace surveyed believed the university was engaging in a community learning policy, although students were again less likely to believe this than other University of Winnipeg constituencies. Furthermore, the results indicated that almost half of the entire sample felt the university was demonstrating the right amount of commitment to community engagement and over two thirds of the sample believed the university was successfully enacting its community learning policy. These findings suggest that students are the constituency within a university which are hardest to make aware of university-community engagement efforts, and that dedicated efforts to inform students about community engagement actions would be beneficial. These findings also indicate that, overall, the university has done a reasonable job not only when it comes to enacting a community engagement policy but also ensuring that its various constituencies are aware and supportive of the university's commitment to that policy. This finding is positive, especially since this institution is located in a community of socioeconomic disadvantage and as Allahwala et al., (2013) argue, strong community-university partnerships are particularly important in such neighborhoods. It is noted that internal support for a university's community engagement efforts is no guarantee that those efforts are being realized by the external community (Hart & Northmore, 2011), but it must also be noted that a lack of awareness and support amongst a university's populace for its community engagement efforts is very likely to hinder the success of such efforts.

Based on the above findings regarding the awareness and support of the University of Winnipeg's populace for its overall community engagement, it is somewhat surprising that the study results demonstrated relatively low levels of awareness and minimal recommendations of the university's specific CLPs among study participants. Only a few of the CLPs were very well known, but the large majority were not, and this was especially true among the student constituency surveyed. This should be of some concern because word of mouth is one of the best forms of endorsement for university-community engagement programs (Robinson & Barnett, 1996) and if the members of a university populace are unaware of the programs, then the university is missing out on this important method of CLP promotion. These findings suggest that universities must carefully attend to communication and advocacy regarding the CLPs they develop. Specifically, it must be made clear who CLPs can benefit or are intended to serve if the university wants its members to support and recommend such programs. Furthermore, a concerted effort likely needs to be made by universities to provide its various constituents, especially the student body, with regular and detailed information regarding current CLPs that the university is offering.

Another area where the perceptions of students surveyed at the University of Winnipeg were found to be significantly different than their faculty, staff/administration counterparts was regarding which community populations are most targeted through the University of Winnipeg's existing CLPs. Most notably, students were significantly less likely than staff/administrators to perceive all but two community populations (i.e., LGBTQIA+; persons with disabilities) as being targeted by the University's CLPs. It is likely that this finding is connected to previously discussed results which seem to suggest that, on the whole, the staff/administration constituency is more connected to the university's community engagement initiatives and therefore more likely to be aware of specific CLPs. It was no surprise that regardless of university constituency surveyed the community populations perceived to be most targeted by the University were indigenous, immigrant and newcomer, and urban core neighbourhoods. All these populations were highlighted in the institutions community engagement policy (Axworthy, 2009) and consequently have been made priorities. The results from this study demonstrate that these priorities have been recognized, and the support of the university's populace for its overall community engagement efforts is an indication that targeting these priority groups was a good idea for the University of Winnipeg. The existing literature would also support targeting these specific community populations because all of them would often be considered communities of racial and/or socioeconomic disadvantage, and it has been argued that partnerships with such groups can be essential for building a university's overall community engagement footprint (Cohen & Yapa, 2003; Allahwala et al., 2013). Additionally, due to the role of universities in the social systems that have perpetuated racial inequalities, it is imperative for universities to engage in reciprocal partnerships with such communities (Bergan et al., 2021) as part of concerted efforts to help right this wrong

If there was any specific community population that study participants perceived to be under-engaged by the university, and yet are relatively abundant in close proximity to the university, it is the older adult community population. In fact, there are numerous seniors' homes and care centers in under ten minutes walking distance to this institution's campus. Due to the vast number of life experiences that older adults have, engagement with this specific community population should be considered a resource all constituencies of a university could benefit from. Researchers have supported this notion and reported various specific benefits attained through university-senior community engagement efforts (Augustin & Freshman, 2016; Wang, 2017). Henceforth, the University of Winnipeg may need to consider CLPs that could address this issue. Regardless, these specific findings related to targeting of community populations lend some support for the development of a university wide community engagement policy. The University of Winnipeg deliberately highlighted specific community populations in its community engagement policy, and over a decade following the release of that policy those highlighted community populations are the ones perceived to be the most targeted. However, any university-community engagement related policy should attempt to identify all potential community groups the university can engage with to ensure none are overlooked or given inadequate consideration when developing CLPs.

It must be noted that just because a university identifies a community population to engage with, it still does not guarantee that community population is being engaged. The members of the community population being targeted would need to be aware of and willing to engage with the university through the various engagement opportunities that are made available. Perceptions amongst all the various constituencies surveyed at the University of Winnipeg were that the surrounding communities, as well as traditionally underrepresented communities, are moderately aware of the CLPs the university offers. This finding is positive because it demonstrates once again that the University of Winnipeg populace believes the university is achieving some level of success in connecting with the community. However, the perceptions of the university populace about community awareness of CLPs is not as valuable as actually getting the community populations to discuss their awareness levels of the University of Winnipeg CLPs. This lack of community perspective is a clear limitation to the present study, but considerable research focusing on the perceptions of community populations regarding university-community engagement initiatives does already exist (Allahwala et al., 2013; Bruning et al., 2006; Hart & Northmore, 2011; Onwuemele, 2018) and consequently this was not an identified area of interest for the present study.

Conclusion

This descriptive case study offers a snapshot of how various constituencies at a Canadian university view various aspects of university-community engagement. It appears that in the case of the University of Winnipeg, support for overall university-community engagement and specific programs for engaging the community has been developed across all campus groupings.

That being said, the self-selecting survey methodology used in the present study has limitations with respect to who responded (i.e., this is not a random representative sample) and the depth and detail of the responses. Consequently, further study of a qualitative nature to delve more deeply into the differences in awareness and support for university community engagement efforts, beyond the high-level identities emphasized in the present study, would be warranted.

In addition, the results from this study provide some support for the creation of a university policy towards community engagement. Having a community engagement policy, however, does not guarantee effective community engagement will occur. Neither will having a university populace that is well informed about that policy and supportive of university's community engagement efforts. However, having these two elements – at least from the perspective of the University of Winnipeg community participating in this study – seems to have a positive influence on university-community engagement, and helps to ensure that some level of success will be achieved.

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