

Community Member Perceptions of Student Service at a Land-Grant University

Joaquin Amaral, Jeremy Elliott-Engel, Sarah Bush, Elli Travis, Lane Woodward, NithyaPryia Ramalingam, and Abdulmueen Bogis



Introduction

Land-grant institutions include local community engagement in their institutional missions. Students gain valuable, real world knowledge, which can increase their leadership skills and attitudes toward civic responsibility. In addition, communities benefit from the time and talents of the students because of their proximity (Bruning, McGrew, & Cooper, 2006). However, both parties are best served when volunteering is viewed from an altruistic perspective, where the intention of the student is to help others (Gage & Thapa, 2012). Little research exists on the views and experiences of community members that receive services, work alongside, or supervise these college students during community service (Gerstenblatt, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

Equity theory of motivation and social exchange theories play a role in successful campus-community relationships. Equity theory stresses the sense of fairness between partners, where both partners are satisfied as long as outcomes are proportionate to inputs, even if the outcomes to both partners are unequal (Miner, 2005). Social exchange theory is based on the evaluation of a current relationship's benefit, and whether it exceeds the benefits of other possible relationships (Cook & Emerson, 1987; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

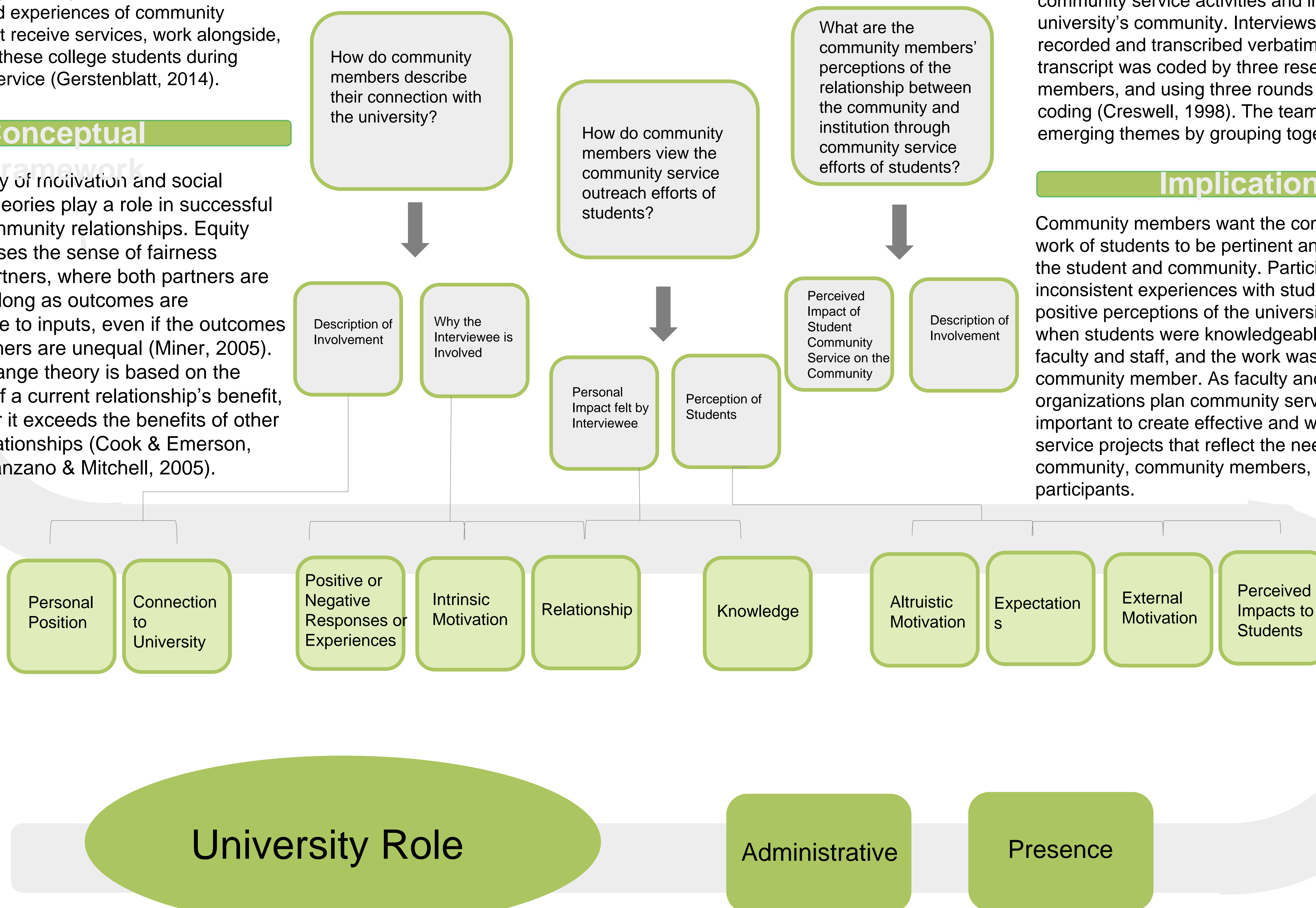
Methods

Seven participants (n=7) volunteered after receiving IRB-approved invitations. The study participant target audience is community members, over the age of 18, who worked alongside, supervised, or received services from university students. All participants were Caucasian, had post-secondary degrees, and ranged in age between 33-87. Three male and four females participated. The research team was comprised of seven graduate students at a land-grant institution. Many members of the research team have been, or currently are, active in community service activities and involved in the university's community. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was coded by three research team members, and using three rounds of iterative coding (Creswell, 1998). The team identified initial emerging themes by grouping together like codes.

Implications

Community members want the community service work of students to be pertinent and valuable to the student and community. Participants had inconsistent experiences with students and their positive perceptions of the university increased when students were knowledgeable, supported by faculty and staff, and the work was relevant to the community member. As faculty and student organizations plan community service efforts it is important to create effective and well-supported service projects that reflect the needs of the community, community members, and student participants.

What are community members' views and experiences with community service?



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