

# Why are University-Community Partnerships Failing? Evidence from the case of the Bachelor of Industrial and Fine Art Program at Makerere University

**Ritah N. Edopu, Phillip Kwesiga, Robinah Kyeyune**  
Makerere University

**Jude Ssempebwa**  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

**John B. Mpoza**  
University of Kisubi

**Abstract.** *In many parts of the world, the development of meaningful partnerships between universities and their communities has become an important strategic development objective. Subsequently, over the last three decades, a significant body of literature has emerged on university-community partnerships (UCPs). However, review of this literature leads to the conclusion that unfortunately, in many instances, the objectives for which UCPs are being implemented are not being realized. Although UCPs seek symbiotic relationships that are mutually beneficial to the participating universities and communities, there are reports that benefits are skewed in disfavor of the communities. As well, concerns have been expressed that, in many instances, would-be UCPs exhibit attributes of community outreach rather than those of community engagement. Why is this the case and what needs to be done to make UCPs work? This paper reports the findings of a study that attempted to respond to this question, taking the case of the Bachelor of Industrial and Fine Art Program at Makerere University.*

**Keywords:** University Community Partnership; Art education; Curriculum innovation

## Introduction

According to Partnership Forum (2008), University Community Partnership (UCP) refers to collaboration between a university and organizations in its local, regional, national or global environment, to promote mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources. UCPs may range from participatory research collaborations (cf. BALTA, nd; Hall, 2010; Lesser & Oscos-Sanchez, 2007; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002) to curriculum development and delivery projects. Over the years, many institutions have customised their own definitions of UCP based on their culture, mission and priorities and terminology such as outreach as scholarly expression, scholarship of outreach, scholarship for the common good, engaged learning, community engagement and civic engagement reflect these differences in emphasis (Fear et al., 2001; Ward, 2003). According to Parsons (1999), common areas of UCP have included upgrading of job-specific skills of service professionals,

increasing the capacity of communities to address their needs and re-educating professionals. Even if it has been variously conceptualised, however, UCP is generally characterized by active involvement with issues, problems and constituencies outside the university in ways that foster the intellectual life of the university (Gregorio et al., 2008). It is a process of applying academic expertise to the desired benefit of persons or organizations that are external to a university but in support of the university's mission (Wilson, 2004). Bringle and Hatcher (2012) emphasize that UCPs are dynamic collaborations that build on the resources, knowledge and expertise of *both* the university and the community to improve the quality of life in community in a manner that is consistent with the university's mission.

A notable point of congruence in the foregoing descriptions of UCP pertains to the symbiosis of effort and benefit between the partnering university and community. In contrast with the more traditional *outreach* paradigm—in which universities take their expertise to communities and communities take their needs and support to universities—in UCP, focus is on what the universities and communities can do and learn when they work with each other in a synergetic manner. Excellent UCP is not episodic; it is programmatic, research-based and (often) long-term.

According to Buys & Bursnall (2007), UCP is beneficial in a way that it takes the university to the community and vice-versa. UCP results into improvements in the relevance of universities' teaching, research and community engagement programs. It is a particularly useful approach for improving scholarship and for forging mutually beneficial and respectful university-community partnerships (Benson, Harkavy & Puckett, 2000). According to Bringle and Hatcher (2002), renewed emphasis on community involvement presents universities with opportunities to develop campus-community partnerships for the common good. These partnerships can leverage both the universities' and communities' resources to address critical issues in the universities and communities. Thus, in many parts of the world, partnerships between communities and universities are gaining momentum as strategies for enhancing positive change (see, for example, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health [CCPH], 2007; Rubin, 2007; Strier, 2010). As communities, organizations and individuals strive to address the challenges and opportunities that face them, they are partnering with universities to accomplish their goals (Baum, 2000; Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, 2007) and, over the last thirty years, a rapidly growing body of literature on UCP has emerged (Rubin, 2007; Driscoll, 2009).

Notwithstanding the benefits with which UCP is associated, two key things discernible from this body of literature are that: 1) despite being formed with the best of intentions, putting UCPs into practice can be very complex (Austin, 2002). It presents significant challenges for all the stakeholders involved and there can be wide disparities between the benefits expected and the experiences that are realised (El Ansari, Phillips & Zwi, 2002; Vidal et al., 2002; Holland, 2002); and 2) in many settings where they have been established, UCPs are not effective. The symbiosis of effort and benefit expected in the UCP approach is not being realised. Conversely, interventions, benefits and research are lopsided in disfavour of the communities and, in some instances, dons have been criticized for garnering funds and building their careers without appropriate acknowledgement of the contributions of members of the communities where they operate (Vernon & Ward, 1999; Roggue & Rocha, 2004; Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, 2007). Unfortunately, a gap in related literature pertains to the fact that it does not clarify on why this is the case and what needs to be done to make UCPs effective. We attempted to close this gap, taking the case of the UCP program in the delivery of the Bachelor of Industrial and Fine Art (BIFA) program at the Margret Trowel School of Industrial and Fine Arts (MTSIFA), Makerere University.

## **Related Literature and Objective**

In attempting to investigate the reasons as to why UCPs are failing, reference to relevant conceptual models—along whose framework pertinent variables may be identified and examined—is germane. Therefore, in conducting the study, we made reference to the Civic Engagement Model of UCP. According to the model, UCP has six main attributes: 1) Institutional and community needs assessment; 2) Leadership of the partnership effort; 3) Ownership of the partnership by those involved; 4) Strategies for implementing the partnership; 5) Evaluation of the UCP program; and 6) Development of a UCP movement (Avila, 2008). To construct a framework for the conceptualisation of research into the reasons underlying the failure of UCP programs, we made reference to literature related to each of these attributes, to identify norms of best practice in UCP against which to consider the satisfactoriness of MTSIFA's efforts to partner with the community in delivering the BIFA program.

Furco and Muller (2009) observe that higher education institutions (HEIs) with institutionalized community partnerships have: 1) philosophies and missions that emphasize engagement; 2) genuine

faculty involvement in UCP related activities and support for research and teaching that have strong components of partnership with the community; 3) a broad range of opportunities for students to participate in high-quality community engagement experiences; (4) infrastructure that supports partnership with the community; and 5) mutually beneficial and sustained partnerships with members of the community. These foundational components work synergistically to build and sustain an institutional culture in which community-engaged research, teaching and public service are valued to the extent that they become fully infused within the academic fabric of the institution. Attention to each of these foundational components is essential for fully institutionalizing partnership with the community.

According to Freeland (2005), three kinds of interaction that have historically characterized university-community relationships are: 1) incidental impacts (characterised by community engagement activities that bring [one-off] benefits to the participating community albeit without actively targeting and mainstreaming these benefits in the engagement effort); 2) intentional contributions (characterised by pursuit of benefits for both the community and university that are deliberately decided upon and arrangements for attaining and sustaining them are mainstreamed in the overall partnership effort); and 3) extracted benefit (characterised by engagement efforts in which participants from the universities actively pursue benefits from the community without regard for the community's inputs and benefits). Freeland advocates for a paradigm shift in UCPs, moving from "incidental impacts" and "extracted benefit" towards constructive collaboration that is mutually beneficial for all the stakeholders involved ("intentional contributions"). Buys and Bursnall (2007) write in concurrence, urging HEIs to adopt partnership with their communities as a core value and to reward their faculty for developing and maintaining partnerships with the community. Particularly noteworthy in Freeland (2005)'s work is the call on the community to help universities to flourish, which underlines the need for a symbiotic, rather than *outreach*, relationship in which the community benefits the university and vice-versa.

Benson, Harkavy & Puckett (2000) note that, if it is to be true to the dual responsibility of service-learning, research on UCP must include both campus and community viewpoints. They argue that research on UCP must acknowledge the fact that actors in the community have important roles to play in creating and sustaining comprehensive and symbiotic UCPs. On the other hand, Scott et al (2005) highlight need for

mainstreaming scholars' contributions to their communities into the broad framework of their universities' partnership effort.

Lee (1997) outlines the critical success factors in UCPs as including civic literacy, faculty support, balancing of course materials to reflect *both* individual and communal responsibility and commitment to confront pertinent ethical issues. Lee adds that, for their part, university trustees and administrators should work for partnerships with the community through sharing and publicizing "best practices" in UCP. Woloshyn, Chalmers & Bosacki (2005) write in concurrence, noting that successful UCP requires commitment and support—to forestall challenges, which tend to be experienced at every stage of the partnership. Freeman et al (2006) corroborate Woloshyn, Chalmers & Bosacki (2005). They note that open and frank discussion about project direction, finances, expectations and alignment of objectives and expectations are essential in implementing effective and sustainable UCPs. Moreover, they add that, even then, there are likely to be differences in perspective in such partnerships that require honest negotiation throughout the lifetime of the project. Similarly, Williams (2000) underscores the need to focus on service to the *larger* community and to develop a sense of citizenship in UCP as critical success factors.

Israel et al (2006) highlight, as correlates of successful UCPs, sustenance of relationships and commitments among the partners involved; sustenance of the knowledge, capacity and values generated from the partnership; and sustenance of the funding, staff, programs and policies that support the partnership.

Reporting on the experience of the University of Auburn, Wilson (2004) suggests that in effective UCPs, attention is paid to ensuring that: 1) there is a substantive link between the university's work and significant societal needs; 2) there is direct application of knowledge to these needs; 3) there is utilization of the expertise of faculty in the partnership effort; and 4) partnership with the community results into generation of new knowledge for the disciplines of the faculty involved.

Gaps between these attributes of best practice in UCP that the authors cited above highlight and institutions' UCPs (if any) were taken to account for the failure of UCP programs. Therefore, the objective of our study was to establish whether the UCP program in the delivery of the BIFA program exemplifies these attributes of best practice in UCP. The significance of the study derives primarily from the fact that much of the writing on UCP focuses only on what UCP programs should be like; what they can achieve; and how they are not achieving the objectives for which they are implemented. Particularly undersubscribed in the literature is the issue of why these programs perform the way they do. It

was our hope that, by comparing attributes of the UCP program in the delivery of the BIFA program to known attributes of best practice in UCP, we might expose some of the reasons as to why some UCP programs are failing.

## **Methodology**

The study followed a cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected on attributes of the implementation of the UCP program in the implementation of the BIFA program. This was done using questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered to a sample of 138 respondents who were drawn from a target population of 183. These included Managers of the MTSIFA, BIFA students and academic staffs teaching on the BIFA program. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of the Art communities of practice partnering with the MTSIFA in the delivery of the BIFA program. The data collection instruments contained three main sections: 1) background information about the respondents; 2) implementation of UCP; and 3) impact of the UCP approach on the BIFA program. The key informant interviews were guided by interview schedules. These were structured in a way that each of the respondents was asked the same lead questions. The instruments were validated by three reviewers. Each of the reviewers was asked to rank the relevance of each of the questions in the questionnaire to the objective of the study. The views of these experts formed the basis for computation of a content validity index (CVI) for the instrument. The index was established at .89. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the students and lecturers' questionnaires were established at .74 and .69 respectively. Frequency counts and percentages were used to reach conclusions on the respondents' view of the implementation and impact of the UCP approach on the BIFA program. The transcriptions from the interviews were subjected to content analysis and the themes arising out of them triangulated with the results of the quantitative analysis. Thereafter, a list of attributes of best practice in UCP identified in the literature was compiled and tabulated. The tabulation was done according to the attributes of UCP in the Civic Engagement Model (cf. 2). The conclusions from the analysis were then used to indicate whether the situation in the delivery of the BIFA program exemplifies the attributes of best practice tabulated.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Table 1 presents a comparison of the attributes of best practice in UCP highlighted in the literature and the situation in the implementation of the BIFA program.

**Table 1:** Attributes of best practice in UCP exemplified in implementation of the BIFA Program

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Attributes of best practice</b>	<b>Situation in BIFA Program<sup>1</sup></b>	
1. Institutional & community needs assessment	Formalized	No	Specific needs relating to UCP are not identified
	Centralized and integrated in overall planning	No	Only student internships in the community are assigned a time period; other forms of engagement with the community are not integrated in planning curricula
	Community needs expressly surveyed	No	There is no formal attempt to identify the needs of the community where students and faculty are supposed to conduct their engagement activities
	Follows participatory approach*	Yes	Students and faculty work with members of the community during engagement activities
2. Leadership of UCP program	Mission that emphasizes engagement*	Yes	MTSIFA follows Makerere University's strategic focus on partnership with community
	UCP policy in place	No	MTSIFA only has guidelines for student internships
	UCP office established	No	MTSIFA has not integrated engagement activities in its structure
	Staff expressly assigned to promotion of UCP	No	There aren't any members of faculty who are assigned to the promotion of community engagement
3. Ownership of UCP program	Community represented directly in university	No	Members of the community are not involved in planning engagement activities
	Engagement activities actively promoted in community*	Yes	Staff and students promote acceptance of their work in the communities where they work
	Outcomes of engagement actively integrated in curricula	No	There is no systematized way for integrating feedback from engagement in curriculum development
4. Strategies for UCP	Implementation of UCP activities incentivized	No	Faculty are not directly remunerated for their involvement in UCP related activities
	UCP activities streamlined in budgeting*	Yes	There is a budget for the supervision of interns who are deployed in organizations in the community

	UCP activities adequately funded	No	Budget for supervising interns is grossly inadequate. With exception of externally funded community engagement projects, there are no funds to support faculty to engage with the community
	UCP activities follow clear work plan*	Yes	Students' internship activities are clearly scheduled on academic calendar
	Broad range of opportunities for involvement in high-quality engagement experiences*	Yes	Students are required to undertake internships in the community as part of their formal study program. MTSIFA hosts some community engagement projects for/by faculty
	Genuine faculty interest in UCP activities	No	Majority of the members of faculty were negatively disposed against engagement with the community, which they characterized as being at the periphery of their mandate
5. Evaluation of UCP program	Systematized mechanism for generating information on performance of UCP activities	No	MTSIFA does not evaluate the effectiveness of its engagement with the community
6. Development of UCP movement	Lessons from UCP activities documented	No	Students and faculty submit reports on their engagement but these are not analysed
	Lessons from UCP activities explicitly shared	No	Experiences from engagement with the community are shared only tacitly with peers

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*\*Exemplified in implementation of BIFA Program; <sup>1</sup>Adapted from Edopu et al (2013)*



A clear point that is notable from Table 1 is that overall, the situation in the delivery of the BIFA program does not exemplify most of the attributes of best practice in UCP that are highlighted in the literature (cf. 2). Although students and members of faculty work with members of the community, assessment of community needs is neither formalized nor integrated in overall planning for the BIFA program. There is no formal attempt to identify the needs of the community where students and faculty are supposed to conduct their partnership activities. Moreover, with exception of having a mission that emphasizes engagement, the MTSIFA neither has a UCP policy nor an office established to promote the approach in the delivery of the school's programs. There are no members of faculty that are expressly assigned to the promotion of UCP and the community with which the partnership is being pursued is not directly represented in planning for the BIFA program. Genuine faculty involvement in UCP was found to be missing. Finally, implementation of UCP activities is neither systematically evaluated nor lessons therefrom shared and/or integrated into the BIFA curriculum.

These gaps between the situation in the delivery of the BIFA program and the attributes of best practice in UCP cited in the literature seem to account for the failure of the UCP program at the MTSIFA. This is especially deducible when it is taken into account that the gaps identified could undermine the usefulness of the areas in the implementation of UCP where the MTSIFA was found to be exemplifying attributes of best practice. Table 1 shows that the BIFA students and faculty teaching on the program work with members of the community during engagement activities. This is in line with the suggestions of authors like Freeland (2005) and Israel et al (2006). However, students and faculty working with a community but whose needs they have not systematically identified using participatory approaches may not achieve the symbiotic partnership that is sought in the UCP approach (cf. Wilson, 2004).

In the same way, the finding that BIFA students are given a broad range of opportunities to engage with the community and that UCP activities follow a streamlined work plan shows the implementation of the UCP program as typifying best practice as recommended by Furco and Muller (2009). However, planned activities that are not appropriately incentivized may not be implemented effectively. The finding that despite being budgeted for, UCP related activities are inadequately funded appears to explain the absence of incentives for staff involvement in UCP related activities. In turn, this absence of

incentives appears to explain the absence of genuine faculty involvement in UCP related activities (Table 1). When considered from the point of view of authors on the subject (e.g. Furco & Muller, 2009; Lee, 1997; Woloshyn, Chalmers & Bosacki, 2005; Freeman et al, 2006; Israel et al, 2006), all these factors seem to account for the failure of the UCP approach in the delivery of the BIFA program.

Accordingly, we concluded that the UCP program in the delivery of the BIFA program is failing because it is not being implemented the way it is supposed to be implemented. To the extent that the case of the BIFA program may be generalized to the experience of other universities, our findings support the hunch that UCP programs are failing because they are not being implemented the way they should be implemented. Our conclusion that the UCP program in the delivery of the BIFA program is failing because it is not being implemented the way it is supposed to be implemented brings one question comes to mind: why doesn't the MTSIFA implement the UCP program as suggested in the literature? And beyond the delivery of the BIFA program at the MTSIFA, we ask why universities don't implement their UCP programs the way they should do so. Our study provides insights that are relevant to the answering of these questions.

First, the finding that UCP activities are not adequately funded gives credence to the hunch that partnership with the community in the delivery of the BIFA program is not incentivized because UCP activities are not adequately funded. As such, our study appears to suggest that improving funding towards UCP related activities could enhance the success of the latter. However, Makerere University, of which MTSIFA is a subset, is grossly underfunded (Altbach, 2006; Ssempebwa & Ssegawa, 2013; Tumusiime, 2007; Oboko, 2013). The underfunding of UCP related activities we noted is probably part of the underfunding of the university as a whole. Accordingly, recommendations to increase funding towards UCP (alluded to by authors like Israel et al, 2006; Woloshyn, Chalmers & Bosacki, 2005) may not be applicable to the university's circumstances. Conversely, information on ways of incentivizing UCP related activities in underfunded contexts is particularly applicable to the university's context. However, this information is generally non-existent – apparently because much of the writing available on UCP reports on the experiences of HEIs in the more developed countries, which are relatively well funded. Therefore, we recommend that future researchers investigate ways of incentivizing UCP related activities in underfunded HEIs.

Secondly, our findings seem to account for the gaps identified in the area of needs assessment (Table 1). Three salient findings that relate to

needs assessment in the UCP program were that: 1) there is no formal attempt to identify the needs of the community; 2) needs assessment is not integrated in overall planning for the BIFA program; and 3) the community with which partnership is being pursued is not directly represented in planning for the BIFA program. In our view, these findings suggest that there is no formal attempt to identify the needs of the community and members of the community are not directly represented in planning for the BIFA program because needs assessment is not integrated in planning for the BIFA program. Partnership with the community was noted only in the area of student internships and academic staffs' projects in the community (Table 1), which are more of *one-off* than pursued on a continual basis. This is contrary to suggestions that, as an approach to higher education delivery, UCP requires that needs assessment and evaluation are a continuous part of overall planning for the academic program/institution (cf. Furco & Muller, 2009; Freeman et al, 2006; Woloshyn, Chalmers & Bosacki, 2005). Thus considered, our findings suggest that, in themselves, the gaps in needs assessment and evaluation of UCP activities identified are not as significant as they may seem. The more important problem is that partnership with the community is being pursued as an isolated component of the BIFA program typical of the "extracted benefit" typology of UCP (Freeland, 2005) in which comprehensive needs assessment and evaluation of activities are at the periphery of the partnership effort.

Therefore, informed by Buys and Bursnall (2007)'s suggestion that HEIs should adopt partnership with their communities as a core value, we recommend that MTSIFA mainstreams partnership with the community as an integral part of the design and delivery of the BIFA program. This will require that the school identifies means through which lessons from partnership with the community are reflected in the program. It will also require that the school identifies ways through which involvement of members of the community in the review of the program may be achieved. Authors like Freeman et al (2006), Israel et al (2006) and Williams (2000) suggest that this could be achieved through implementing a UCP policy that promotes representation of the community in the university and through assigning an office and members of faculty who are expressly charged with promoting partnership with the community. However, MTSIFA was found to be lacking both these requirements. Our study is limited in a way that it does not account for the absence of a UCP office and officers at the MTSIFA despite having a mission that emphasizes partnership. Therefore, we recommend that future researchers investigate the

reasons underlying the absence of this office and officers with the view to provide guidance on what needs to be done to acquire them.

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