

Where All May Meet on Common Ground:  
Elements of College Unions Evident in Campus Community

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## **Dedication**

For all of the college union pioneers – past, present, and future.

And with a reverent nod to C. Richard Scott, I say thank you. I never knew Dick Scott, but what he stood for got me started on this path.

*A union is not just a certain kind of physical structure. A union, in the best sense, is a well-considered plan for the community life of the college.*

Porter Butts, 1971

## **Abstract**

The college union, having served as a thriving community center on college campuses for more than 100 years, is a compelling venue to discuss physical space and community. The purpose of this study is to understand how highly rated unions make meaning of community, to identify common elements of college unions that are evident in campus community, and to provide a framework that practitioners can use when building or developing facilities that are purposefully community-centered. Despite the existing scholarship regarding community on campus, very little formal research can be found regarding community and its relationship with the college union (DeSawal and Yakaboski, 2013). Understanding this gap, the research presented in this paper aims to offer new insight into the connection between community and the college union.

The research questions developed for this study are: 1) How do students attending colleges with highly rated union facilities make meaning of community?, and 2) What elements of highly rated unions contribute to the development of community on college campuses? The research questions were addressed by employing action research methods as described by Herr and Anderson (2005). Briefly explained, this process entails identifying the problem at hand, inserting oneself (the researcher) into the subject, investigating what is already occurring/not occurring, and developing an action plan to improve upon the existing process.

This qualitative study researched three college union cases, each located on public regional campuses in the upper Midwest. Multiple site visits of the college unions were conducted over the course of this study, which included semi-structured interviews with

facility managers/directors, focus groups with users of the facilities, a review of documents related to the design and construction of those facilities, and researcher observations. The college unions selected as case studies are: Porter Memorial Union (PMU) – the central hub of activity at Alliance State University; C. Shaw Student Center (CSSC) – a focal point of community on the campus of State University–Concord; and Shirley Bird Student Union (SBSU) – which sits at the center of the Hearthstone State University campus.

Following the collection and subsequent distillation of data into patterns and relationships, five key elements of community emerged. The discovered common elements that are evident in campus community among the three college union cases are: 1) Student-Centered, 2) Dynamic Spaces, 3) Pathways to Success, 4) College is a Conversation, and 5) House of Serendipity. When taken together, the elements presented in this study offer a well-considered plan for college union leaders, designers, and university administrators to employ when moving forward with college union renovation or construction projects.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Background**

American colleges and universities today are as diverse as the constituents they serve. Among many types, colleges exist as singular locations in brick and mortar form, as online virtual campuses, and as systems of physical campuses spread across a region or even the world. Higher education institutions serve 17 year-old freshmen to 70 year-old retirees and everyone in between including working parents, returning veterans, full-time, part-time, undergraduate, graduate, rich, poor, oppressed, privileged, and other students with any number of distinguishing characteristics. Regardless of location, type, or population served, it may be argued that at least one distinction remains constant across all of our colleges and universities: the preponderance of community. It is this existence of community that makes a college collegial.

### **Community**

In this paper, community (in the college/university setting) is described as physical interactions in real space – in coffee shops, commons, lounges, food courts, games rooms, organization offices, or any other common spaces where interaction among campus community members may occur. This concept of community focuses primarily on actors within the institution (students, faculty, staff), and how they build cohesion as a learning community. This differs from other definitions of community that may instead focus on the relationship with community partners outside the institution (Furco, 2010).

Making this distinction, Boyer (1990), identifies six characteristics that define our campus communities, suggesting that universities should be: 1) educationally purposeful,

2) open, 3) just, 4) disciplined, 5) caring, and 6) celebrative. He states that students do not like the feeling of “being a number in a book” (p. 48) and need to feel at home on their college campus. Building upon Boyer’s work, Cheng (2004) identified three aspects of the college student experience that can be directly associated with their sense of campus community: 1) feelings about being cared for, 2) feelings of isolation or loneliness, and 3) quality of social life on campus. Cheng suggests, “in order for students to have a strong sense of community – faculty, staff, administrators, and students have to work together to nurture an environment where each person is respected and honored while ideas, beliefs, and opinions can be expressed freely” (p. 229). The outcomes of Cheng’s study support the notion that a student’s college environment plays a critical role in developing his or her sense of community. We also know from Schlossberg’s (1989) seminal work on “mattering” that a connection to community is important to both persistence and student success.

Higher education scholars who study physical space and community agree on three assumptions about the existence of community on our college campuses (Dahlgren, Dougherty, and Goodno, 2013; Rullman, van den Kieboom, and Van Jura, 2012). These scholars suggest that:

1. Physical spaces provide opportunities for effective learning and community development.
2. Creating campus community is a critical factor in meeting the outcomes of higher education institutions.
3. Facility planning occurs in departmental silos that respect organizational structures, rather than a manner that can best affect how students experience college life.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a gap exists between what educational institutions *say* they are doing, and actually *understanding* what they are doing when it comes to constructing and developing community spaces on their campuses. Studying students' and other campus members' sense of community in their campus spaces has merit in designing new facilities that take into account user needs and intentions to build community. One compelling context to explore the notion of physical space and community is the college union facility. The college union, both a facility and a program by definition, incorporates the notion of physical space (facility), but also the intended outcomes of creating intentional learning communities (program). In simpler terminology, the college union lends itself well to a study of community relative to both the bricks and mortar, as well as the programmatic elements such as staff, student activities, connections, amenities, services, etc.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Ample research illustrates the value of community and its important context within higher education (Boyer, 1990; Berger, 1997; Dahlgren, et al., 2013; Harrington, 2013; Kuh, et al., 2005; Ma, 2003; Manning and Kuh, 2005; Reif, 2014; Rullman and Harrington, 2014; Rullman, et al, 2012; Solheid, 2014). Despite the existing scholarship regarding community on campus, very few empirical studies exist regarding the college union and community. Understanding this gap, the research presented in this paper aims to offer new insight into the connection between community and the college union.

This study is inspired by a recent review conducted by DeSawal and Yakaboski (2013). The authors reviewed 30 years worth of dissertations related to the college union.

After a thorough survey of database results, they were able to identify a mere 23 college union-related dissertations, of which only four focused specifically on the college union facility itself. In contrast, Barrett (2014) notes that nearly 50 dissertations were completed on the topic of university housing in just a five-year span. As I have been delving into this research topic myself, I have identified close to ten in-progress or very recently completed dissertations or theses pertaining to the college union. A swell of research is therefore forthcoming regarding the college union and its connection and influence on creating community on college campuses. The findings from this study will fit well into this emerging body of knowledge.

This study focuses on the *college union facility* found on traditional residential campuses as a venue to study physical space and community in higher education. The college union has served as a thriving community center on college campuses for more than 100 years. College unions are known to their campuses as student unions, memorial unions, student centers, college unions, university centers, and many other names and types. Regardless of nomenclature, college unions share a common purpose. Serving as centers of campus community development has long been their *raison d'être*. The college union is a compelling venue to discuss physical space and community for many reasons. Historically, college unions served as the hearthstone of campus life. Many unions still serve this purpose, although the contemporary union environment typically provides space and programming for various communities of students (and faculty/staff), rather than serving merely as a central gathering space for all (*Role of the College Union*, 1996).

In recent years, newly renovated or constructed college unions have been rated on their success related to building community. Specifically, these ratings have emphasized

how the planning and design process itself involved students and the campus community, what aspects of the campus community's goals helped shaped the building, and how the uses of space have supported building community and student learning. In the last eleven years, 65 college unions – as evaluated by the Association for College Union International (ACUI) Facility Design Award Process – have been identified as high performing unions in relation to building community. The purpose of this study is to understand how students within highly rated unions make meaning of community, and to identify common elements of college unions that are evident in campus community. A secondary intent of the study is to provide a framework that practitioners can use when building or developing facilities that are purposefully community-centered. The evaluation process initiated by ACUI provides an opportunity to study attributes of highly rated unions as it contributes to community building.

### **Research Questions**

Using both the criteria and evaluation results from ACUI's award process (outlined in Appendix B), the following research questions guide this study:

1. How do students attending colleges with highly rated union facilities make meaning of community?
2. What elements of highly rated unions contribute to the development of community on college campuses?

To address these questions, the next section will provide an historical context for the creation and development of the American college union. Understanding a brief history of college unions in the United States helps set the stage for a study that captures the community-building spirit present in these facilities since their inception. A review of

literature will follow in Chapter 2, revealing the relationships that are known to exist between physical space and the prevalence of campus community – both the physical environment itself and the outcome provided by that environment. Relevant literature includes both empirical research and practitioner-reports that provide understandings about the space-community connection. The literature reveals that community is both supported by the physical space, as well as created by the users themselves.

## **Historical Context**

### *Early American College Unions*

When the first annual meeting of union directors was held at the Ohio Union on the campus of Ohio State University on December 4-5, 1914, the concept of the student union was already known on a small number of American campuses including universities in Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. However, the student union movement itself was in its infancy and was welcomed into the world on the opening page of the report of the first annual conference of the National Association of Student Unions (*Report*, 1915):

*It is believed by those present at this meeting that the Union is the most vital force in unifying the student body, molding the college spirit and promoting democracy, thus tending to break down arbitrary class and social distinctions. Without such a unifying force any student body, which is naturally broken up into different departments and classes, is apt to center its interest and enthusiasm in some particular department or organization, rather than in the school as a whole (pg. 1).*

A prophetic opening indeed, today's *Role of the College Union* (1996) has changed little from this initial concept – specifically using the phrases: *a unifying force, a sense of*

*community*, and *the value of diversity*, which clearly draw upon the original report. While the original framework for the student union may have remained relatively constant, the program plan, delivery method, facility, and constituencies served have certainly evolved.

In the early years, the student union existed first as an organization of students, without the often-majestic buildings we are accustomed to seeing on campuses today. Derived from the University of Cambridge model established in 1815, the original union idea aimed to form a campus-wide organization that cut across separate lines, bringing unity to the student body (albeit at the time reserved solely for white men) via debate and fellowship (Butts, 1965). A number of student unions made their first American appearance during the turn of the 20th century at many elite institutions including Harvard University's Union, the University of Pennsylvania's Houston Hall, and Brown University's Rockefeller Hall, later called Faunce House. The catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania described its organization and facility like this: "The purpose of Houston Hall is to provide for all the students of the various departments a place where all may meet on common ground; and to furnish them with every available facility for passing their leisure hours in harmless recreation and amusement" (Butts, 1971, p. 10). Of course it should be noted that the use of the term "all" did not actually mean every student. At the time the early college unions were being created, most excluded membership to women and students of color. It wasn't long before the union movement migrated west to what are now the Big Ten universities, and soon after to campuses farther west in Washington state and southern California, but membership remained wholly white and male.

By the 1920s, student unions were well established on a number of campuses and included such regular programming as billiards, bowling, vaudeville, dances, and film screenings (Drake, 1924; 1929). The classic program of this era was the “smoker,” an event used both as an opportunity to recruit members and to raise funds for the organization. The earliest smokers would have been reserved solely for men who primarily engaged in eating, smoking cigars, drinking liquor, and playing card games. All of this, of course, allowed for a great deal of informal social interaction among the men which in turn created camaraderie and community that might not have otherwise existed. While university administrators for the most part supported the actions of the student unions, some started to become worried about gambling, alcohol over-consumption, and most concerning – the omission of women from most if not all programming. At the 1929 meeting of the Association of College and University Unions at which 27 campuses were represented, the Wisconsin Union was the sole group who reported admitting women into their membership (Drake, 1929). Women were not excluded completely – some organizations pronounced that women were attending events under male chaperone, while others reported hiring “mature women” to keep watch over the boys while they were congregating. But tides were turning and only eight short years later, seven of the 50 registered member delegates and associates at the annual conference were women, and many more were soon to come (Fisher, 1937). In fact, it was noted only a few years later “women students have taken over campus activities,” (Williamson et al., 1946, p. 30). It should be noted, however, that real equal opportunity may still have been in waiting, as seen in the annual proceedings of the 1937 convention in which women delegates were

extended the courtesy (or perhaps patronization) of being referred to as “Miss” or “Mrs.” while the men were listed without the formal use of a title (Fisher, 1937).

### *Expansion – Facilities and Membership*

The need for physical space on campus became the primary focus for student unions during the 1920s and early 1930s. A review of the proceedings from the annual meetings during that time produces dozens of topics related to alumni fundraising (often memorial funds generated for those lost in World War I), design plans and meetings with architects, negotiating with university administration, and charging mandatory dues/fees for all enrolled students. Construction of new facilities would allow for an even greater equalization of the campus community, providing a space for all members to meet on common ground. Thelin (2004) explains that college administrators were often supportive of these building projects as it allowed them some perceived control over the collective life of the student union members. While the buildings themselves allowed for more involvement opportunities for all students, especially those who were marginalized or perceived as outsiders, Thelin attests that the elite and often wealthier students simply bypassed the union building for their own private living and social arrangements. Some of this same separation can be seen today with students living in residence halls, on-campus apartments, and Greek houses – while commuter students often rely on the union as their vehicle for engaging with their campus community.

During the mid 1930s and into the Second World War, with the introduction of professional staff that was hired to manage the new facilities and programs, student unions were seen as clear avenues for student development. Dr. J.E. Walters, former

president of the student union and director of personnel for Purdue University, addressed the Association of College Unions membership at their annual convention confirming, “extracurricular activities can be very beneficial to the students’ social development” (Walters, 1937, pg. 27). He challenged the faculty to go beyond merely tolerating activities, and move to an understanding of the importance of social interaction and leadership opportunities in the overall development of their students. While this type of co-curricular experience is much more commonplace today, it was still a relatively novel idea for campuses to embrace. Even today, rather than embrace all that the college union experience provides for student engagement and retention, some faculty members criticize what the college union has become. Primary criticism from the academy is that the college union has become an overpriced showpiece visitor center, catering to the unending demands of student desires (Lewis, 2003).

Following Walters later that evening was Purdue President Edward Elliott who emphasized the student union’s significant role in the education of the whole student when he declared:

*You are, after all, the chief energizing element of this new agency – the Student Union – that has come into the life of the modern American college and university. You and your Unions, I firmly believe, are destined to be dominant forces in the solution of that most difficult of all educational issues – that of providing an humane education for human beings; or, rather, of putting a higher humanness into the higher education of those who would be higher in life (Elliott, 1937, pg. 57).*

Thus began a period in which the social life of both men and women was enhanced, and also in which the seeds of a culturally and educationally social life for the entire college community were being planted (Ouzts, et al., 1946). Yet this was not a new concept, simply newly integrated into a more formal setting. *The collegiate way* of providing more

than a classroom and library had existed for nearly 200 years in one form or another on various campuses (Rudolph, 1990). Primarily driven by student interests and often governed by them as well, the collegiate way ensured the inclusion of a residential scheme – a complete living environment that wholly encompassed the student’s life. This characterization of Rudolph’s concept can be found in the philosophy that the union is much more than a building and the education of the whole student is emphasized, as illustrated in a University of Wisconsin alumnus publication from 1926: “It has been, together with the dormitories and an all-inclusive physical education program, the embodiment of a fundamental idea in education – the idea that only full living induces full learning...” (Butts, 1971, p. 18). This idea would hold true for the Wisconsin Union and hundreds of others, continually tested as new generations of students required new styles of service, programs, learning, and community engagement.

The end of World War II brought about not only a return of traditional students, but also a flood of war veterans able to take advantage of the GI Bill (Thelin, 2004). One of the most extreme examples of the influx of veterans on college campuses was at the multi-campus University of Minnesota system, which saw an increase from 11,872 students in 1945 to a staggering 27,982 students only one year later (Lehmberg & Pflaum, 2001). Campus leaders were ill prepared for the sudden increase in numbers, and were not properly equipped to provide necessary opportunities to engage these students. Veterans were looking for more substantial positions of leadership, expected more from their campus, and did not want arbitrary decisions made for them (Williamson, et al., 1946). The hastily constructed University Village just northeast of Minnesota’s Minneapolis campus housed 674 student families and over 2,000 total residents, with little thought

given to the need for social interaction among the occupants. Soon the residents met their own needs and essentially created their own student union facility – a small space with a coffee shop, games room, study lounge, library, and TV room (Lehmborg & Pflaum, 2001). The need for gathering and to share common experiences was evident even among some of the first non-traditional students.

Butts (1951) discussed the union becoming the community center for the campus (or in this case University Village), with both student government and a shared governance model. He reminded us, “wherever men and women are gathered, a social center and program are needed” (p.76). As women were beginning to reshape union membership and program planning, so too were veterans creating/requiring a new slate of campus programs and services. College unions today serve a similar purpose, often housing a variety of programs and services most in demand by a diverse student body.

### *Opening Doors*

The immediate post-war period also marked the first time that significant discussions of race relations appeared in college unions. Several sessions and discussion panels appear in the proceedings of the Association of College Unions from 1946-1950. Students involved in leadership roles with their college unions were sponsoring programs designed to promote better inter-racial understanding among students. Most reported that they felt the unions were the entities most responsible for seeing that adequate activity and discussion around race issues was provided for the campus community. While a number of Negro colleges (today known as Historically Black Colleges and Universities or HBCUs) existed mainly throughout the South, many Black students were attending

predominantly White institutions in search of a higher quality education. In 1917, only two Negro colleges – Howard University and Fisk University – operated at an educational level that was then known as a true American university (Rudolph, 1990). Thirty years later there were scarce more at that level. But not soon after, by the 1960s with the support of the United Negro College Fund and desegregation throughout the country, the educational quality available to Black students improved greatly on these campuses. Yet many of those students were still being drawn to the larger, more traditional college campuses.

With the arrival of this relatively small minority, the dominant race was searching for ways to assimilate rather than integrate Black (and Latino/Chicano, American Indian, and Asian-American) students into their version of college life. The mixture of cultures made assimilation difficult, if not impossible, and minority population students were not necessarily looking to leave their own culture and heritage behind, nor should they have been expected to do so. Similar struggles exist on campuses today, and the college union often serves as a community gathering place for students of color or students who feel marginalized in one way or another (Milani, Eakin, & Brattain, 1992). A more thorough understanding of the community-needs of all student constituents is necessary for envisioning the union's role in providing effective community space.

Another aspect that unions were dealing with in the late 1940s and into the 1950s was a surge in student involvement. With the increase in enrollment came a desire for more community engagement and the need to serve many more students. Union staff members were becoming greatly overworked, some facing 16-hour days almost seven days a week (Butts, 1971). The energy of the union building often did not come to life

until after 6:00 in the evening and would remain active until midnight or later – all this coming after a full day’s work of providing student services and staffing administrative offices. Along with the stress of providing for a greater number of students, the need to provide for a greater variety of constituents was developing as well. Alumni, faculty, staff, and community members were now active users of union facilities. The term *student union* had become an antiquated misnomer, long separated from the early days before facilities and professional staff were a significant part of the union operation.

Staff, students, and administration struggled with the governing of their programs and buildings, much as they still do today. Students leaned on heritage and claimed they had full ownership, yet were unable on most campuses to manage the day-to-day operations. Alumni who raised the majority of the funds for many buildings claimed some ownership, but were infrequent visitors. Staff who toiled long hours in the building felt they should control, or at least influence the programs and operations. It was during this time that we see the spread of a new partnership philosophy. The unions at Indiana University, Ohio State University, University of Wisconsin, and others had from their very beginnings incorporated successful models of student leaders working in tandem with professional administrators to manage both the program and the operation of their facilities (Kerr, 1995). This stood in contrast to many of the Canadian student unions, as well as the California model of Associated Students, Inc., who were all fully student-run organizations. The partnership philosophy would prepare many unions to take the next step in their evolution of serving ever-increasing populations, but would be challenged by the mid 1960s during the initial stages of student unrest and protest on college campuses (Brattain, 1981; Kerr, 1995).

## *Student Unrest*

The annual conference of the Association of College Unions in 1965 brought a number of new session titles including: *Campus Rebellion – the Instant Mob*, *Controversial Speakers and Socio-Political Groups*, and *Civil Rights and Wrongs*. In fact, the president of the association, A.L. Ellingson (1965), focused his remarks to the membership by stating, "...yet to speak in April, 1965 on any subject other than student unrest and its attendant symptoms of demonstrations, riots, sit-ins, and lie-downs, would seem inappropriate and cowardly" (pg. 39). Ellingson's words illustrate the emotions that must have been swirling around the room that year – the feelings of frustration and hopelessness among staff not prepared to work in this newly evolving environment. Following on the heels of the University of California Berkeley's "Free Speech Movement" begun in the fall of 1964, many campuses were feeling their own effects of student unrest and distrust of campus leadership (Kitchell, 1990; Ellingson, 1965). Ellingson challenged his colleagues to reach out to the students, to provide safe places for them to congregate throughout the union, and to provide programs where their voices could freely be heard, yet in a more controlled environment. With higher education becoming increasingly more specialized and vocation-oriented, education for citizenship was being relegated largely to the general program of the first year or two, simply forgotten as an important part of the development of the student (Kerr, 1995). Modern college unions often serve the same role as their predecessors, allowing for central gathering places for student issues – both encouraging and supporting the student voice rather than suppressing it. One might surmise that the sense of community that students

feel in their college union is what draws them to the space and helps them feel more comfortable truly expressing themselves.

Perhaps a lingering (or even strong) sense of *in loco parentis* remained on many campuses. Some women still faced curfews, decisions about student life were made in absence of students, and students were told rather than guided on how to pursue their academic studies. Veysey (1965) contemplated that college students were nearly always immature and that “wrong ideas and impulses in leading minds have great destructive power” (p.43). Coupled with the civil rights movement and the escalating war in Vietnam, this patronizing model of student oversight created a long, slow, quiet burn that in the eyes of administrators seemed to explode with little warning campus by campus. Ellingson (1965) referenced this parental notion in his remarks to the Association of College Unions, surmising that the university had shifted away from a caring aspect in favor of a more authoritarian style of student management – “nobody really cares about their development, but everybody cares a lot about whether they behave themselves” (p. 43). Collectively, students of the 1960s were exhibiting a greater knowledge of their world and a new level of sophistication in finding their place within it. Their ability to effectively lobby for and achieve their needs, albeit at times controversial, pushed the landscape of the American campus into a new era.

### *Communiversality*

Equally if not more influential in changing the course of higher education was the passing of the Higher Education Act of 1965, more specifically the financial assistance provisions set forth in Title IV. With the increase in federal money provided to colleges

and universities and the low interest loans and grants available to students, the door of opportunity opened yet wider on college campuses. As was the case during the height of the GI Bill, campuses were again deluged with applications from a new demographic of students looking to pursue their own dreams of a college education. College union students and staff again faced the need to not only accommodate but also incorporate these new students into their programming and operations (Thomas, 1966). The latter part of the 1960s saw a significant growth in student organizations and activities that were not part of the traditional program. Union directors and their staff were struggling with ways to (and even the notion if they should) effectively assist these groups of students. To meet this demand the era also saw the creation of new offices of Student Activities, Recreational Sports, and even Dean of Students offices that were more involved in program planning and student advising. The days of the college union providing and/or supporting the vast majority of the campus' activities were fading (Butts, 1971; Brattain, 1981).

It was during the late 1960s that unions and their leaders fully began to look beyond the walls of their buildings and out to their campus community. Spelman (1969) asked, "Why can't the union operate through the dormitories? Why can't the stigma be removed of bringing the people to the program?" (p. 95). Others agreed that the path must lead students from the union out to the campus community and beyond. Yet at the same time unions were also being asked to become the agents of change for their campuses, as was the case at SUNY-Stony Brook following student race conflicts (Reyes, 1969). The union was still seen as the only place on campus where all students were accustomed to co-mingling, and thus best suited to be the physical place on campus to build unity.

The theme of the 1969 ACUI annual conference was “Communiversality” indicating the profession’s continued commitment to bringing its diverse populations into one community (a concept as old as the college union itself). Metz (1997) spoke of the era and tied it to the present in his opening remarks at the Indiana Professional Development Seminar when he posited, “the more students tend to be separated into socially limited units, the more important the union’s function to assist in the integration of the student body” (p. 46). Another example came from a case study from the fictional Santa Maria University, which challenged conference participants to think about how their union boards could emphasize programs for minorities, and to seek additional funding to provide opportunities for new minority leaders on campus (Barrett, 1969). Following James Meredith’s contested enrollment at the University of Mississippi in 1962 and the passing of the Civil Rights Bill in 1964, among many other factors, college unions were reacting well to serve the changing needs of their student constituents (especially in comparison to many other entities on campus).

#### *Role of the College Union - ACUI*

For more than 100 years the college union has served as the common ground where students, faculty, staff, and local community members can meet and engage in ideas with one other. The *Role of the College Union* (1996), originally written and affirmed by the membership of the Association of College Unions International (ACUI) in 1956 and updated by the membership in 1996, stands today as the core foundational framework for the college union profession (see *Appendix A*). At the heart of this statement is the philosophy that the union is the center of college community life – that

the college union is a student-centered organization that encourages self-directed activity. The “Role,” as it is known among many union professionals, is touted as being influential in the development of college union mission statements, as a guide for student employee development, as the core of student activity programming, and as a framework for the planning processes for events and conferences. The Role manifests itself in the physical structures of college unions, and also in the spaces themselves where community is actively lived.

With the opening of many new and renovated college unions every year across the country, it is important to discern how (or if) the Role is used as one of the many tools in construction and renovation projects. Campus construction projects can range from \$1 million to well over \$50 million (Revisiting Construction, 2012), and with so many resources at stake, simple logic dictates that facility managers and project planners should be quite intentional in their efforts to create student-centered communities. Scholarly disciplines that inform the design and use of space are necessary for creating venues that serve the primary aims of the Role. Some of these key disciplines are introduced in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

In this section, I draw on the fields of Environmental Psychology, Education, Architecture and Design, as well as industry practices to understand the relationship between physical space and community in the context of the college union. The following sections articulate scholarly perspectives from these areas of discipline, especially in the cross-section of community and facility. These disciplinary frameworks provide context for understanding how college union facilities and their programs may be intentionally designed to promote community within our colleges and universities. The frameworks, founded in both theory and practice, provide the basis for my investigation articulated in Chapter 3. The literature review provided here provides the basis for understanding what is known on the topic and how my study contributes to this knowledge base.

#### **Environmental Psychology and Education**

Significant research exists around the study of places and community, especially in the fields of environmental psychology and education (Tuan, 1979; Bickford and Wright, 2006; Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001; and Ma, 2003). One of the most highly regarded space scholars, Ray Oldenburg (1999), touts the importance of the *third place* – a location which is neither home nor work, but rather “neutral ground upon which people may gather. There must be places where individuals may come and go as they please, in which no one is required to play host, and in which we all feel at home and comfortable” (p. 22). Oldenburg’s work reveals the psychological connection that people feel with these third places, not uncommon to the familiar comfort and support that is felt when

one is at home. It is this familiar concept of the comfort of *home* that previous environmental studies have tried to uncover, and yet there remains a dearth of empirical research regarding the physical spaces of the college union facility.

Other research suggests, however, that the place itself is not enough to create the attachment. Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) in their paper on place attachment reveal, “social attachment is greater than physical attachment in all cases” (p. 279). It is this social connection with others that helps create the strongest bond with place. Yet, the authors agree that *both* dimensions (physical and social) are necessary for the development of strong place attachment. Using this frame of place attachment, one might suggest that retailers such as Starbucks, Barnes & Noble, and Whole Foods have successfully reimagined the spaces they provide for their customers - creating an atmosphere that invites people to actually engage with their shopping environment, as well as with each other. Basic anecdotal observations of these national retail outlets provide examples of the bridge between comfortable social and physical environments. It is this same type of attachment that is revealed throughout the literature on student engagement in higher education (Schlossberg, 1989; Kuh, et al., 1991; Oldenburg, 1999; Banning & Bryner, 2001; Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney, 2005; Manning and Kuh, 2005; Solheid, 2014).

In a more dense view of space and place from a humanistic perspective, Tuan (1979) reveals the ways in which individuals or various cultural groups may experience space. Specifically the author contends, “place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning” (p. 387). In other words, the users

of the space define the space for themselves. Roper (2013) poses it slightly differently when he asks – “Who owns community?” He challenges educational leaders to step up and “own” the communities that they provide for their students, because “at every level people are seeking connection, engagement, and nourishment...there is a powerful desire for community” (p. 279). In his view the community can be shaped by the owners (in this case administrators in a university setting) rather than simply shaped or defined by the users. Tuan (1979) counter-argues, “engineers create localities but time is needed to create space” (p. 421). When looking at the effect that the college union has on the creation of community on college campuses, it is especially important to focus on the users of the space – the students, faculty, staff, and guests – and not merely the facility planners and managers.

One such user-focused study conducted by Ma (2003) reviewed survey data from nearly 7,000 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from the Canadian province of New Brunswick to assess factors that contribute to students’ sense of belonging. Ma’s study relied on data from the 1996 New Brunswick School Climate Study in which all students participated. The researcher utilized hierarchical linear modeling in order to group students within specific schools before analyzing the data. Students were grouped, or nested, according to gender, SES, native status, number of parents, number of siblings, academic achievement, self-esteem, and general health. Ma’s (2003) study revealed four findings germane to an investigation of student unions: 1) students’ self-esteem is the single most important predictor of sense of belonging; 2) students’ health level is the next most important factor – as well as an indicator of their ability to fully participate both socially and academically; 3) school climate is more important than school context related to

students' sense of belonging; and 4) level of academic achievement is not critical for students' sense of belonging, but rather it is the existence of a core group of caring peers and teachers who can help guide them to academic success. While the findings may not be directly transferable to the college union, the study reveals that a sense of belonging is important to building community – that factors such as school climate and student self-esteem play significant roles in shaping sense of belonging.

One limitation of Ma's (2003) work is that it lacked evidence about school practices that might promote belonging among students. However, work by Schlossberg (1989) offers one source of evidence as it relates to the feeling of *mattering* and the importance of getting students involved with their community. Schlossberg asserts that a sense of community is essential to human survival and that “the creation of environments that clearly indicate to all students that they matter will urge them to greater involvement” (p.14). Like Schlossberg's understanding of *mattering*, Rullman and Harrington (2014) recognize that a college student's feelings of belonging to a community are inherently necessary in order to fully participate in the learning experience. The authors suggest, “community created [in college unions] can help individuals apply what is learned in and beyond the classroom, while also experimenting with meaningful interaction and a deepening of understanding about self and others” (p. 43). From the context of environmental psychology and human behavior Oldenburg (1999) observes that “Experiences occur in places conducive to them, or they do not occur at all. When certain kinds of places disappear, certain experiences also disappear” (p. 295). If this holds true, a correlating assumption might be that the manner in which a college union provides for community (or does not) may have a significant affect on the

community itself.

In a recent study relying on a hierarchical multiple regression analysis from a secondary data set, Barrett (2014) identified a conspicuous relationship between the college union and students' sense of community. Since the beginnings of the college union movement, practitioners have opined on the strong connection between college unions and community, and yet the Barrett study appears to be the first to offer empirical evidence substantiating the claim. Citing few limitations within the study that analyzed a student opinion survey administered by a large state system of higher education, the findings clearly indicate that physical space does in fact matter to creating campus community, and that "sense of community on campus can be enhanced through the facilities and programs of the college union" (Barrett, 2014, pp. 137). Understanding the importance of community and student success described earlier in this chapter, the statistically significant findings in this study imply that the college union, in turn, is related to important aspects of student success. Further research is necessary to identify specific elements of the college union that allow for this successful creation of community to occur.

### **Architecture and Design**

The field of architecture and design has a well-established body of empirical evidence regarding the evaluation and study of physical spaces. A review of contemporary literature from this field provides another lens from which to understand community and physical space. The college union is one of the most well-known and archetypal buildings found on college campuses. Environments typically found in college

unions today include: multiple food venues; ample lounge spaces that can accommodate a variety of active study, work, and social activities; properly sized meeting and event spaces with appropriate supporting components; and the co-location of related student life and staff office environments (Rullman, van den Kieboom, and Van Jura, 2012). Large spaces typically have focal points or gathering spots that are easily identified. With multiple user groups (including students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and guests), college unions have the distinction of often trying to be all things for all people. This notion has helped these spaces become true community centers, but has also led some spaces down the road of over-extension. When a space is not able to take on an identity, it can create an unwelcoming environment – or at least one that is not particularly inviting to the user (Strange and Banning, 2001). As referenced previously in the works of Tuan (1979), Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001), and Roper (2013), user-assigned identity of space plays an important factor in the existence of community.

In their own study of how first-year students perceive colleges based on campus architecture, Bennett and Benton (2001) found that “students attributed greater success to a college with modern architecture than they did to a college with traditional architecture” (p.174). In this case students perceived that certain modern or contemporary styles helped a facility (and in turn the campus) seem more successful or prestigious. Certainly the planning of campus space should not be solely designed around this particular finding, but it does offer an opportunity to consider how various campus constituents might perceive a new or fresher look. Additionally, Manning and Kuh (2005) suggest the following in regard to making place matter to students:

- Optimize the natural setting for student learning and success

- Adapt and align the physical environment with the institutional values, priorities, and goals for student success
- Create human scale learning environments

The authors state, “[the] powerful connection to something larger than oneself encourages students to engage with faculty, staff, and peers in meaningful ways” (p.1). Let us imagine a campus with the espoused values of engagement, learning, integrity, inclusiveness, and sustainability in its mission and vision. Campus leaders developing renovation or construction plans for their spaces might consider choosing architecture and design firms that not only understand the importance of creating physical space that is inviting and encourages interaction, but also which model those espoused values. Firms that do not or are unwilling to understand the distinct values of a university community may not be able to effectively design space that appropriately fits the campus. Rather, they may create unwelcoming physical or psychological barriers that impede the successful development of campus community.

Recent literature provides an insight into the common barriers to creating effective community on college campuses. Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney (2005) review how density plays a significant role in creating or detracting from a welcoming environment. Spaces can feel too spread out or too restrained if not designed properly for the flow of people throughout the day. Strange and Banning (2001) identify three conditions essential for creating successful campus environments: safety, inclusion, and involvement. They argue that the absence of any of those elements renders the community non-functional. The authors also advocate for the need to create sub-environments within spaces: “There must be an attempt to design for the wide range of individual characteristics found among students” (p. 201).

A recent qualitative study conducted by Rullman, van den Kieboom, and Van Jura (2012) brought together leaders from several higher education associations including the Association of College Unions International, Association of College and University Housing Officers-International, Association of College and University Libraries, National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association, and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Joining them were design professionals from the Society for College and University Planning, the Committee on Architecture for Education of the American Institute of Architects, and the International Interior Design Association. Those invited all had expertise in and/or primary responsibility for the creation of effective campus buildings and space. This group gathered for a long weekend for what was billed as *Physical Place on Campus: A Summit on Building Community* (Rullman, et al., 2012). Summit organizers developed the premise that “higher education lacks a common definition or vocabulary to democratize participation in facility planning and design, and transparent alignment between [*sic*] research, educational goals, project implementation, and facility management” (p.5). The problem was framed employing the following four questions:

- What barriers prevent us from achieving community through physical places?
- What does community look like and what are its elements?
- How do we know when community has been influenced by place?
- How do we measure it?

Summit organizers report three specific findings from their expert think-tank that provoke the need for further study. First, they report that higher education leaders and design professionals may in fact be the barriers themselves, and that more intentionality

needs to be built into the design of university buildings and spaces. For example, policies and processes might be developed that offer higher accord to hierarchy or personal preference, rather than creating designs that ultimately work best for the campus environment. Their second notion suggests that university facilities should be designed to be less permanent in order to respond better to changing needs among campus community members. For example, walls should be temporary or moveable, or support space should be intentionally designed with the idea that the larger useable space may need to be redefined. The final, perhaps more radical, finding stands contrary to the contemporary college union design philosophy, suggesting that large centralized facilities may not be the most desirable nor effective facilities for the creation of bonding among diverse peoples. Alternatives that emerged from the meeting include distributing space across campus to optimize both scale and access or centralizing intentionality while decentralizing the spaces themselves (Rullman, et al., 2012). With this in mind, the observation and collection of data from college unions are additional factors to consider when framing the understanding of community building in college union spaces.

While not related specifically to an overall understanding of the development of community, Hatton, Farley, and Costas (2013) used post-occupancy focus groups to identify ten timeless design trends in three newly renovated/constructed college unions. Developed as a case study, the researchers utilized a participatory action method similar to *Photovoice*, where participants are asked to use photography to reflect on their community's strengths and weaknesses (Wang and Burris, 1997). In this instance, the researchers themselves provided both interior and exterior photographs of the completed unions and recorded the reactions of the participants. One significant outcome from this

case study included the identification of ten timeless design elements for today's college unions: the hearth, exterior transparency, entrances, interior visibility, information gathering, retail, community dining, flexibility, sustainability, and accessibility. Additionally the study revealed that technology, bookstores, dedicated space, décor, and costs are five trends that are evolving. An overall outcome from their research indicates that planning for the long term is as equal or more important than planning for an immediate need (Hatton, et al., 2013).

### **Practitioner and Commercial Industry**

The practitioner or commercial industry also contributes significantly to the growing body of knowledge around students, space, and community. Furniture giant Steelcase has embarked on an aggressive “human-centered design research process” that involves collaboration among psychologists, sociologists, environmentalists, and designers (Active learning spaces, 2012). In fact, Steelcase marketing has emerged as a comprehensive guidebook on creating active learning spaces everywhere on campus – both inside and outside the classroom. Steelcase research identifies the campus as a “learning ecosystem” (Active Learning Spaces, 2012, p. 8), and they offer 100+ pages of the results from their own research on learning spaces. Barely a quarter of the entire guidebook is dedicated to the actual furniture options that they sell, referred to as “product solutions” rather than merely a collection of tables, chairs, desks, etc.

Colleagues Doorley and Witthoft (2012) from Stanford University's Hasso Plattner Institute of Design recently collaborated on a book in which design students can find practical applications of what they are learning in their formal courses of study.

Defining space as “the body language of an organization” (p. 38), the authors illustrate how space can alter behavior, develop its own culture, and provide the necessary transitions from one dynamic environment to another. While not focused solely (or even specifically) on educational spaces, the authors’ observations and lessons provide an excellent framework from which to view the college union and its connection with community. Their view is supported in a recent edition of *360 - The Magazine of Workplace Research, Insight, and Trends* (Rethinking, 2010) in which the design and use of campus space is carefully correlated with the learning mission of the institution. Large, communal spaces help tell the story of the campus and set the stage for learning well beyond the classroom and library.

Another recent study conducted by Steelcase Education Solutions focused on post-occupancy student engagement in active learning spaces. The researchers developed an instrument to measure the ways in which an intentionally designed space could affect student engagement (Scott-Webber, Strickland, and Kapitula, 2013). In a pre-test, students were first asked to identify qualities of their former classroom learning environment. Those data were then compared to a post-test in which students identified the qualities of the new, intentionally designed learning environment. Using a multivariate analysis to test for differences in composite scores, the researchers found that “there was no evidence that the average practices and solutions scores varied based on the institution, education level, perception of classroom instruction, or SES solution” (Scott-Webber, et al., 2013). Yet findings from the study reveal that over 75 percent of respondents indicated at least a moderate increase in three factors of engagement related to their new environment including: 1) motivation to attend class, 2) ability to achieve a

higher grade, and 3) overall engagement in the class. Their outcomes support previous studies indicating a connection between intentional design and its impact on user behavior (Doorley and Witthoft 2012; Active learning spaces, 2012). However, the results of this study should be interpreted cautiously, as the data were self-reported by the subjects and therefore cannot be considered causal.

### **Community as a Place**

If universities (and in turn college unions) look to fully pursue their missions, community is not optional; it is an essential component of university life. Advocating the necessity of a vibrant and thriving community on a college campus is, perhaps, a debate so one-sided that one could not lose. If community rests at the core of the college campus, then at the core of the college campus rests the college union, and its implied duty to serve as a center for community. Sociologist Parker J. Palmer, well known for his research and writings in education and community, argues that an educational institution's mission can be summed up in three words: *knowing*, *teaching*, and *learning*. If this is so, he says, then the enterprise itself is "essentially communal" (Palmer, 2002, p. 179). Perhaps it is the routine interaction of individuals that can help build a sense of community. Hallways create opportunity for interaction, as they serve as the circulation spine of buildings. Demarest (2001) reveals "schools are placing an emphasis on creating living spaces more conducive to social and academic interaction among students" (p. 1). Areas like hallways, where the largest number of people are likely to come in contact with each other, might be better treated as community spaces themselves rather than as mere passageways from one space to another.

Urbanist William “Holly” Whyte began observing human behavior in city spaces in 1969 when he was working with the New York City Planning Commission. What began as an urban design project – more specifically on creating incentive zoning for developers to provide parks and plazas – culminated in a 15+ year study of human behavior in the urban setting (Whyte, 1988). In an early work (the author calls it a “pre-book”), Whyte (1980) identified the principal needs of indoor public spaces: seating, food, retailing, and toilets. He and his research team discovered that effective indoor spaces have an “excellent relationship with the street and surroundings. They are eminently visible, and this helps make pedestrian flows easy” (Whyte, 1980, p. 76). Referencing over two decades of Brutalist architecture, especially prominent in large urban settings, Whyte challenged the notion that indoor spaces needed to be isolated or even protected from the outside environment. Typical Brutalist philosophy in architecture lends the design to appear fortress-like, very large or daunting in scale. In contrast, Whyte suggested that places should be made friendlier and noted that there were simple solutions in both the design and management of spaces to make it much easier for people to mingle. He came to understand the importance of sight lines, the careful placement of walls, ample and varied seating, and the difference between a mere corridor and a vibrant passageway: “It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished” (p. 109).

Due in part to the rapid expansion of their campus facilities with ever-rising enrollments and a fear of potential student unrest, many universities embraced Brutalism from the late 1950s through the 1970s. Most of those facilities remain on campuses today, desperately trying to serve learning environments that inherently need ample

opportunity for interaction within their communities rather than physical spaces that discourage community engagement. In their study on student success in college, Kuh, et al. (2005) identify Macalester College's Campus Center as a vibrant gathering space, likely because it is void of the cold, totalitarian aspects prominent in Brutalist buildings. They note that students and faculty members alike describe it as an inviting, convenient place to meet. Their study identifies the *conditions that matter* in creating student success and they make special note of the importance of campuses that are place conscious. "Through buildings, signs, and the landscape of campus, the physical environment communicates messages that influence students' feelings of well-being, belonging, and identity" (Kuh, et al., 2005, p. 106). The authors suggest that place-conscious campuses "create learning environments from natural and constructed settings, and design curricular offerings and pedagogical approaches that induce people to form strong attachments to the 'place'" (p. 108). A significant criticism of Brutalism is its broad, stark forms that inhibit connections with its inhabitants. In contrast, facilities like the one identified at Macalester offer a collection of small, intimate spaces located within a large communal space. This effect in turn allows for the creation of human-scale environments, which are much more conducive to creating community among its occupants (Strange and Banning, 2001; Manning and Kuh, 2005; and Whyte, 1988).

## **Summary: The Quest for Community**

Definitions of “community” are as unique and varied as the numbers of communities themselves. There exist, however, common elements and themes across all types of communities – whether they are small, large, mono-cultural, diverse, tight-knit, or loosely connected. McMillan and Chavis (1986) provide a framework from which a more broad definition of community might be formulated. The authors propose four essential elements that comprise their definition of sense of community: 1) membership, 2) influence, 3) integration and fulfillment of needs, and 4) shared emotional connection. Established before Boyer’s (1990) seminal piece on campus community, McMillan and Chavis (1986) advocate for communities that are free, open, and accepting. They go on to insist, “we must learn to use sense of community as a tool for fostering understanding and cooperation” (p. 16).

In his study of students’ sense of campus community, Cheng (2004) identifies a caring environment as being critical to each student’s sense of belonging on campus. Students need to feel at home with their environment and comfortable with the way they are perceived and treated by others. The author states, “what connects students with the community is not just small circles of friends who share personal interests; it is also effective programming and organized social opportunities” (p. 228). Not surprisingly, Cheng’s study also reveals a feeling of loneliness as the most negative influence on a student’s sense of community. It is quite possible that this lack of community, or at least perception of community, can detract from a student’s ability to connect with their campus environment. A wealth of literature exists that supports students’ connection with their campus and their likelihood of persistence and graduation (Kuh, et al., 1991; Astin,

1993; Berger, 1997; Tinto, 2001). The college union, typically designed as a common space for all students and campus community members, is therefore well positioned to create ample opportunity for community building (and in turn higher persistence and completion rates) among all students.

In concert with Cheng (2004), University of Minnesota researchers, Harrold, Hendel, Melton, and Scouten (1991) find that over three-fourths of students surveyed do not limit their definition of community merely to a close-knit group of people. The researchers report that *any* size group – who share some common interests and values – is the overwhelmingly preferred definition of community among students when the emphasis is on size or closeness of the group. Additional findings in their study reveal students living farther from campus experience less community than those who live closer, and that involvement with student groups and on-campus employment correlates directly as well. The authors also report that students are more likely to indicate heightened experiences with community when they are actively involved with fraternities/sororities, engage in campus sports activities, participate in campus groups, or work in an on-campus job. The researchers did not find a correlation between academic success (as measured by cumulative GPA) and students' experience with community. This finding suggests that classroom performance is not necessarily an indicator of a student's ability to connect with their academic community. Most pertinent and significant to the college union study proposed here, the University of Minnesota study identifies “gathering informally with friends on campus” as second only to attending classes as having the highest impact in contributing to a sense of community (Harrold, et

al., 1991, p. 3). More investigation is necessary to understand how students identify informal gathering spaces and their effect on community and sense of belonging.

While there is a practical base of space analysis, as well as scholarly research related to place-making and sense of belonging, there is scarce research that tie the two together. The studies and findings from Bennett and Benton (2011), Rullman, et al. (2012), and Strange and Banning (2001) align well with the potential framework for a college union community study. The sense of place described and analyzed across multiple disciplines including Tuan (1979), Ma (2003), and Oldenburg (1999) is the same sense of place (i.e. community) that requires further inquiry. Using Whyte's (1980; 1988) analyses of urban spaces and their connection to both individuals and groups of people has promise in examining how college unions play similar roles in their own "urban" environments on college campuses.

## Chapter 3

### Research Design Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand how highly rated unions make meaning of community, and to identify common elements of college unions that are evident in campus community. A secondary intent of the study is to provide a framework that practitioners can use when building or developing facilities that are purposefully community-centered. We know from Cheng (2004) that college students' positive experiences can be directly associated with their sense of campus community – specifically about feeling cared for, enjoying a quality social life, and not having a sense of loneliness. Schlossberg (1989) refers to this as “mattering” – essentially a sense of belonging (to a community). The literature reviewed previously in this paper suggests the same, that a sense of belonging is a fundamental element to creating community, especially on college campuses. The college union, a community center by both design and function, is therefore an appropriate and important subject to study regarding campus community. The research questions guiding this study are:

- 1) How do students attending colleges with highly rated union facilities make meaning of community?
- 2) What elements of highly rated unions contribute to the development of community on college campuses?

While the notion of community may be unique for each individual college campus, for the purposes of this study, the definition of “campus community” will be considered as the following: *Physical and social elements that allow for the interaction and free-exchange of ideas among students, faculty, staff, alumni, and guests.* Along with a review

of pertinent literature, much of which is contained earlier in this paper, it is this definition of community that will inform and guide the subsequent research. The research questions are rooted in the notion that some existing set of common elements influences the development of community on college campuses. The literature review articulated in Chapter 2 informs the understanding of these elements. This study draws on past research by examining common themes throughout this body of literature that may exist across campus unions among sample institutions.

### **Research Design**

The research questions were addressed by employing participatory action research (PAR) methods as described by Herr and Anderson (2005). In PAR, inquiry is “done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them” (p. 3). Herr and Anderson (2005) further describe a process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting – and then repeating as necessary. Briefly explained, this process entails identifying the problem at hand, inserting oneself into the subject, investigating what is already occurring (or not occurring), and developing an action plan to improve upon the existing process. The authors contend that in order for the researcher to be directly engaged with the subject, the researcher must be able to actively connect with the subject(s). This is most easily accomplished when the researcher is considered to be an insider, rather than an outsider, regarding the subject being studied. The authors acknowledge that becoming a true “insider” can be difficult in dissertation research, especially considering the limitations around timeframe and proximity. Therefore the outsider-within status may be considered a more practical stance, with the researcher

coming from within the field (more globally) even if they are considered an outsider to the specific subject being studied. Merriam (2009) suggests that the vast majority of research in applied fields (like education) comes from the researcher's personal interest in the field itself. This is the case with this study, and the reason for the implementation of the PAR method.

Reasons that PAR is appropriate for this study include: 1) the participants and researcher together produce new knowledge, 2) the results of the research are immediately available for practical application in the field, and 3) as a researcher-practitioner I will be able to incorporate the findings from this study directly into my professional work. With this mind, Collins (1990) (as cited in Herr and Anderson, 2005) suggests that, "outsiders-within offer a specialized, subjugated knowledge, a 'peculiar marginality,' that provides a unique standpoint..." (p. 44). It is this outsider-within stance that was employed for this study, given my own personal background in the college union environment. Yet, for this research, I have studied facilities and interviewed participants that are not directly known by me, nor with whom I had prior established relationships.

Participatory action research is becoming more widely used in the fields of education and community health, most notably among practitioners seeking to study and improve their own environments (Baum, MacDougal, and Smith, 2006). Some examples of this method in educational research include: place-based approaches to community change (Nowell, et al., 2006); teaching methods for the inclusive classroom (Bruffy, 2012); instructional leadership design at community colleges (Burke, 2014); and integrating fund-raising activities into the curriculum (Thorley, et al., 2014). As in those

studies, PAR is most appropriate for this college union study given the outcomes that are desired. The qualitative research here, done on-site and directly with individuals who “live” in the facilities, will identify elements of community that could not be identified from a large quantitative study. The richness of data collected from focus groups, interviewee stories, and on-site observations is the hallmark of the PAR method, especially when used in a case study approach. With my own outsider-within research status regarding college unions, I have the opportunity to uncover information that would not otherwise surface using other research methods. The results of this study will be directly shared with the case sites themselves, allowing for all individuals involved with the research to benefit from the findings and incorporate them into their practice.

As with any methodology, the PAR method has limitations, particularly in the area of external validity (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Researchers who come from within an organization may naturally bring their own biases and preconceived notions of what they are studying. Action research typically demands some sort of intervention as part of the process itself. In this study, rather than an actual intervention into the subject being studied, the researcher is also using the PAR method to better inform each case study as the research progresses.

### *Position of the Researcher*

As a qualitative researcher, I am most interested in how individuals interpret their own experiences and how they make meaning of those experiences (Merriam, 2009). It is this interpretation and meaning-making that laid the foundation for the development of the research questions. My professional background in college unions greatly informs my

understandings and orientation toward the subject. I have served four campuses in varying roles related to college union facility management. I began my career as a graduate student building manager, moved on to an assistant director for activities and leadership, then a facility director, and serve currently as an upper-level administrator responsible for multiple facilities and operations. I have visited well over 50 college unions/student centers in my career and have developed a catalog of photos and personal memories regarding community-building concepts that work well, and others that need improvement. I have also presented professionally over a dozen times at both the regional and national levels regarding effective planning and programming for college unions. With this background and experience, I bring a strong passion for and understanding of the college union field, coupled with a potentially marked bias into any research that involves college union facilities or campus facilities in general. Several careful measures have been employed throughout the research design, collection, and analysis in order to protect against potential research bias. The handling of bias is addressed by Maxwell's (2005) model discussed in the following sections.

#### *Limitations and Opportunities for PAR*

Because PAR is contextual by nature, a notable limitation to this method is that the results of the study may not be generalizable. However, insights from the case studies here could inform other studies and practices that are also context specific. With so much at stake when college union facilities are being planned it remains paramount that designers, facility managers, administrators, and campus community members be well informed when they embark on a new project. With this in mind and in order to be most

effective, a study that reveals elements of college unions existing in campus community has been tested for external validity.

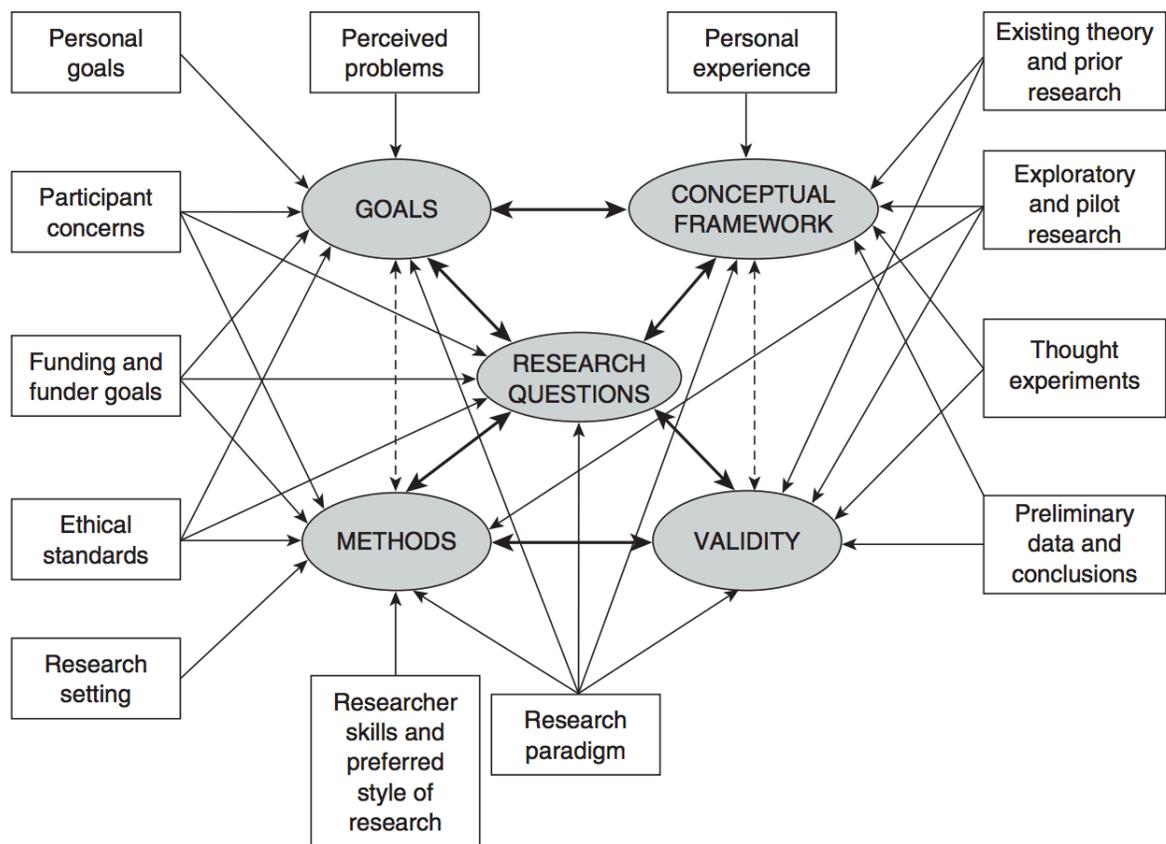
One way to create more opportunity for external validity and to mitigate bias is to utilize an interactive approach, as illustrated in Maxwell's (2005) *Interactive Model of Research Design* (Diagram 3.1). This approach lessens the likelihood of bias by providing a core group of components from which the research derives (framework, goals, methods, validity, and research questions). As illustrated in Diagram 3.1, core components both actuate and are influenced by a number of accessory components (personal experience, participant concerns, research paradigm, ethical standards, and so on). Briefly explained, the model emphasizes maintaining the research questions at the "heart" of the study, with the design components linked with each other in a non-linear fashion. Similar to a research design presented in Miles and Huberman (1994), Maxwell (2005) refers to the connections among the components akin to "rubber bands" since they can be flexible based on the specific research design, but also create tension among the components themselves. If the tension among some components becomes either too loose or too great, the design could fail and therefore become ineffective for the study. These webs of connections are critical to adding to the integrity of PAR studies and represent the basis of my approach for this study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As with other methodologies, the PAR method draws on theoretical framework to guide the analysis. Merriam (2009) defines the theoretical framework as "the underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame of your study. [It is] derived from the orientation or

stance that you bring to your study” (p. 66). In typical applied research, theoretical frameworks guide the study in a way that allows the investigator and participants to work in partnership with each other, advancing knowledge in both research and practice. The PAR method used here draws from conventional applied research methods, but allows for a more intentional involvement of both the researcher and the participants into the study itself. Several components illustrated in Maxwell’s Interactive Model of Research Design framework (*personal experience, perceived problems, participant concerns, and research*

Diagram 3.1 – Maxwell’s Interactive Model of Research Design



(Maxwell, 2005, p. 6)

*setting*) parallel the values that are supported within the PAR approach (Alvarez and Gutierrez, 2001). Action research allows for a cycle of data collection and analysis, followed by reflection, and subsequent data collection and analysis. Baum, MacDougal, and Smith (2006) affirm, “experience can be a basis of knowing and that experiential learning can lead to a legitimate form of knowledge that influences practice” (p. 854). The intended outcome of this study is not merely to gain new knowledge around campus community building, but to also inform the actual practice of: 1) the participants involved with the study itself, 2) facility construction and management professionals, and 3) the researcher’s own professional work.

Earlier in this paper, a statement by Palmer (2002) declared that the collegiate enterprise is itself communal by nature. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 includes scholarship from the fields of environmental psychology, education, architecture and design, as well as contemporary research from the commercial industry. The bodies of literature, while somewhat distinct, share a common connection when using the lens of community in which to view them. This common connection, or lens, creates a protocol for the collection of data. The works of Strange and Banning (2001), Oldenburg (1999), Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney (2005), and Rullman, et al. (2012), among many others cited in the literature review, provide the basis for the study as well as help shape the framework for this analysis.

### *College Unions as Unit of Analysis*

The conceptual framework, guided by earlier research, seeks to identify themes and/or trends in college union construction and community building (Hatton, et al., 2013;

Turner and Fifer, 2003; Rullman and van den Kieboom, 2012). Referencing Christopher Alexander's (1979) *The Timeless Way of Building*, Hatton et al., (2013) identified their own timeless elements of college union design using a three-campus case study. The researchers conducted post-occupancy focus groups with the original stakeholders who were involved with the renovation and construction of college union facilities. Photographs of the facilities were used to identify positive and negative reactions from the participants. Additionally, the researchers conducted interviews with student users, and also collected data from additional college unions that were not used in the focus groups. A list of ten timeless elements were identified (Hatton, Farley, and Costas, 2013):

- 1) The Hearth – a focal point for socializing
- 2) Exterior Transparency – union serves as a “billboard” of campus activity
- 3) Entrances – a beacon that draws students into the building
- 4) Interior Visibility – inviting and open atmosphere with abundant light
- 5) Information Gathering – a vital function that will never go out of style
- 6) Retail – a marketplace for students that also helps support the bottom line
- 7) Community Dining – engage customers in dining process & with each other
- 8) Flexibility – built in flexibility to accommodate ever-changing needs
- 9) Sustainability – stewardship of energy and use of local materials
- 10) Accessibility – equal access, regardless of ability

In a self-study including a review of eight peer institutions, review of pertinent literature, and discussion with industry professionals, Turner and Fifer (2003) identified 14 categories of on-campus programming, many of which can be found in the college union. Relative to the elements of community being uncovered this study, some of the categories include:

- Community outreach
- Concerts and music events
- Film presentations
- Late-night programs

- Performing arts
- Recruitment and retention
- Service
- Speakers and guest lecturers
- Tradition and school spirit

Another significant study, referred to in Chapter 2, illustrates a set of attributes related to engaging campus spaces. In their *Summit on Community Building*, Rullman and van den Kieboom (2012) and summit participants identified eight key attributes of community:

- *Engaging*: Interaction is visible and palpable between people and groups. This form of engagement is something more than mere proximity; it appears active, involving, and dynamic.
- *Bridging*: Mutuality, commitment, and commonality occur between people who are seemingly similar.
- *Layering*: Individuals can find places of personal refuge before moving into larger group settings and spaces. This scaling of space allows individuals to move from safer and more personal space to larger and more civic space commensurate with their comfort.
- *Agency*: Individuals feel a sense of ownership over themselves, their relationships, and the spaces they occupy. Space, furniture, and other physical attributes can be easily modified without permission for comfort or functionality.
- *Responsive*: Physical spaces can morph, adapt, flex, and fundamentally change as needed throughout the day and over the years.
- *Distributed*: Space is appropriately decentralized and distributed throughout campus to optimize access, convenience, scale, refuge, and personalization.
- *Deviation*: Policies and other restrictions that inhibit flexibility and sense of personal agency are minimized.
- *Gestalt*: All elements (e.g. light, furniture, materials, diversity, sound, location, activity) work together to create a functional “wholeness” that cannot be created by only its parts.

An opportunity exists to further the researchers' studies and research outcomes, as well as compare and contrast these identified elements with a different sample of college unions, intentionally selected for their recognized community-building aspects. The interview and focus group questions used in this study, as well as the framework for observations and document review, seek to provide both additional analyses of these previous studies as well as uncovering new knowledge.

### *Case Selection*

The study of *community* is a study of environment, and so the study focuses on college union sites as the unit of analysis. Because this study focuses on attributes of highly rated unions, the first step was to identify potential facilities that fit into this category. To meet this criterion, I reviewed the recipients from the last eleven years of the annually juried Association of College Unions (ACUI) Facility Design Awards process. Each year, ACUI identifies up to seven college unions and other student-support facilities that meet certain criteria relative to: campus community, student involvement, creative use of space, aesthetics, and so on. Initiated in 2005, the awards recognize both new construction and renovation of existing college union facilities that “encourage excellence in the design of student-centered facilities that support campus community building and student learning” (Facility Design Awards, 2014). A complete summary of award criteria and eligibility can be found in *Appendix B*.

Over the last eleven years ACUI has recognized 65 facilities designed by 22 different design firms. Campuses with recognized facilities have included public, private,

large, small, residential, and commuter, among numerous Carnegie Classifications (2015). A review of the campus-types from all 65 award-winning facilities reveals several common identifiers that allow for general categorization. Campuses can be slotted into several of the following Carnegie categories listed in Table 3.1.

*Table 3.1 – Carnegie Classifications Reviewed (selected)*

Public	Private	
Highly residential	Residential	Non-residential
Rural	Urban	Metropolitan
RU/VH research very high	RU/H research high	DRU doctoral
Master’s L	Master’s M	Master’s S

A study of all 65 facilities was not feasible for the intended scope of this research using a PAR analysis; therefore the selection of a manageable sample from the available population was necessary. Reasonable proximity to the researcher was the first criterion in identifying possible facilities to include in the study. Referred to as a “convenience sample,” this type of selection criteria is often utilized in the PAR method, given the researcher’s need to be connected in some way to the research subject itself (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Facilities within a day’s drive by vehicle were considered to be a necessary convenience for this research project given the need to make multiple site visits, therefore proximity serves as the first filter in reducing the population to an appropriate sample size. This process revealed a list of 17 potential facilities. Given the significant focus on community in this study, it is important to consider both the residential and size components of each of the campuses (Carnegie Classifications, 2015). Highly residential campuses, typically smaller in size, are more likely to have a

stronger sense of community and belonging among their students. Conversely, non-residential and very large campuses are more likely to lack some sense of community and belonging (Schlossberg, 1989; Kuh, et al., 2005). Campuses categorized as *residential* and *medium* are more likely to fall in between, and therefore lend themselves to having more potential to be influenced by intentionally designed community-building facilities. Therefore, college union facilities from medium/residential campuses were selected for this study.

The previously reviewed literature indicates that a positive correlation exists between the presence of a vibrant campus community and student success, and also that physical space can influence that vibrant campus community. Considering the research design for this study, identifying college unions from similar campuses (rather than randomly selected, potentially disparate campus types) has the potential to provide the greatest contribution to the literature. Qualitative studies do not typically lend themselves well to providing outcomes that can be broadly generalized (Merriam, 2009). However, the intent of action research is to create new knowledge that can be used in practical ways beyond the research subject itself – in other words, that it may be replicated successfully in similar settings. This is especially true for this study, considering the desired outcome of identifying common elements in college unions relative to campus community. It will also be important that this research offers suggestions of elements that can be further developed and generalized in future studies. With this in mind, the selection of similar institutions provides the best opportunity for the findings to have the broadest applicability possible.

Using the convenience, size, and residential-type criteria, seven award-winning facilities were identified, from which three were selected. To protect the anonymity of all participants and to increase the validity of the findings, pseudonyms have been used to identify the three facilities that were studied. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the pseudonyms of the college unions studied are: Porter Memorial Union (PMU), C. Shaw Student Center (CSSC), and Shirley Bird Student Union (SBSU). Each union resides on a campus that can be classified as a public, regional, residential institution with a student population between 9,500-15,500 students.

### **Data Collection**

The history and literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicate that: 1) the college union is both a physical place *and* a program, 2) community is formed by individuals within its spaces and by the spaces themselves, and 3) students seek a sense of belonging within the spaces they inhabit. The interview/focus questions were developed with these three principles in mind. In designing my data collection strategies, I drew on the work of Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) who suggest, “the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences” (p. 1). The authors go on to state that the effective research interview is a craft, even an art, which must be practiced and honed if knowledge is to be constructed. Another qualitative research scholar insists, “the way in which questions are worded is a critical consideration in extracting the type of information desired” (Merriam, 2009, p. 95).

The identification of the problem context and participants is a critical step of the research process, and therefore careful consideration of the selection criteria for interviewees was necessary. Because the study is physical-space based, the identification of spaces occurred first, subsequently followed by the identification of interview subjects with first-hand knowledge of the selected spaces. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state “if you want to study people’s behavior and their interaction with their environment, the observations and informal conversations of field studies will usually give more valid knowledge than merely asking subjects about their behavior” (p. 115). Because of the nature of this study, it was imperative that multiple personal visits be made to multiple facilities in order for proper observation to occur.

A study of the physical spaces within college union facilities was a critical component of this study. Multiple site visits of college union facilities were conducted over the course of this study, which included interviews with facility managers/directors, focus groups with the users of the facilities, a review of documents related to the design and construction of those facilities, and researcher observations. The collection of interviews, site observations, and document review has created a robust body of qualitative data. Triangulating the observations of the physical spaces, along with the design documents and the richness of the interviewees’ commentary, will allow for more valid conclusions to be drawn in Chapter 5 regarding the elements of community present (or absent) in each of the facilities that are studied. A study of three college unions from three similar campuses (medium-sized, residential) has allowed for an effective multi-case analysis.

The protocol for data collection was drawn from the conceptual framework. *Appendix D* illustrates the set of interview/focus group questions and their relationship to the conceptual framework of this study. In particular, questions 2-4, 9, and 10 allow for an interrogation that can be adapted following each interview (the cyclical approach in the PAR method). Information gathered in a PAR study is used throughout the research process to refine the next steps of the data collection. Participants are seen as direct contributors to the research, and therefore “PAR tempers [the] expert knowledge (of the researcher) with the expertise of locals about their own problems and solutions” (Herr and Anderson, p. 10). Questions 5-6 were developed to test the reliability of answers from other questions. In other words, the information sought from questions 5-6 was used to analyze how the statements given in other questions matched what actually was occurring (or not) within the college unions being studied. Finally, questions 7-8 encouraged reflection by the participants themselves, which in turn allowed for a richer set of responses, especially as the line of questioning progressed.

Guided by these rationales, I followed the PAR method protocol that employs a cyclical approach: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Therefore the questions have been crafted specifically to allow for this process to happen, and for new knowledge to be uncovered by both the researcher and the participants as well from each subsequent site visit.

#### *Informants: Interviewees and Focus Group Participants*

The key informants that are most appropriate to addressing the research question are facility directors, students, faculty, and staff. Given their frequent interaction with the

space, these informants are the most appropriate individuals who may speak to their own meaning about community in the college union context. First, facility directors from the college union cases were interviewed regarding their spaces and how they are utilized. I acknowledge that a limitation of drawing on the views of this group is that they may be unable or unwilling to identify gaps or problems in their spaces, thus producing an overly favorable collection of observations. This is due to the pride they may have in their facilities. I did not, however, find that the directors withheld any constructive or critical information during the interview process. I was careful to build rapport with each director and provided the assurance that our conversations would remain confidential and the sites anonymous.

To establish a connection with this first interview group, I wrote to the directors/managers of those spaces to inform them of my study (see *Appendix C*). I followed up one week later with an email, and then a phone call to confirm the directors' willingness to participate in the study. Careful scheduling was a key component in order to best facilitate my own travel and campus visits, along with an appropriate consideration of the directors' time. Much like Beamer's (2002) identification when interviewing elite lawmakers, so too was the need to carefully design my interview questions in order to truly break through into new knowledge, while avoiding the mere compilation of facility testimonials from proud directors. Interview questions used for this study with the facility directors can be found in *Appendix D*.

In addition to interviewing facility directors, identifying a focus group(s) of users at each facility (students, faculty, and staff) helped provide a more rounded and appropriate balance of responsive data on each space. Facility directors were essential in

identifying potential focus group participants, as well as recruiting them to take part in the study. Involvement with the college union as either an employee, volunteer, or student leader was a central criterion for selection to the focus groups. As the central “users” of the college unions being studied, the focus group participants provided first-hand perspectives on how they made meaning of community within their facilities. Including user groups provided additional rich descriptions and data from a vantage point that could not be provided by facility observations alone. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) support the focus group as an important method to gather different viewpoints: “Focus group interviews are well suited for exploratory studies in a new domain, since the lively collective interaction may bring forth more spontaneous expressive and emotional views than in individual, often more cognitive, interviews” (p. 150). As I surmised going into the study, most of the members in the focus groups were not even aware that their particular facility had received a design award, and so they likely did not enter the focus group interview with the same biases that the directors might have had. Nor, as users, did they view the facility in the same manner as the directors.

### *Data Analysis and Validity*

With three facilities being studied, a multiple-case qualitative analysis has been utilized. Miles and Huberman (1994) confirm the validity of this type of analysis, offering that “looking at multiple actors in multiple settings enhances generalizability; the key processes, constructs, and explanations in play can be tested in several different configurations” (p. 435). The multiple-case analysis allows for commonalities to be identified among the facilities, building sets of patterns that arise from the data collected

for each. By breaking down and coding patterns of data collected from interviews, focus groups, review of documents, and researcher observations, a valid list of findings that identify the common community-building techniques utilized by each, and perhaps all, of the facilities studied can be identified. In Chapter 4 the findings from my study will be interpreted through my conceptual framework by rooting them within the context of the three bodies of scholarship from the previously reviewed literature.

Proper Institutional Review Board approval (IRB Study Number: 1507E75381) was obtained from the University of Minnesota prior to any research being conducted or communication with any of the participants. Each individual who participated in the study received the University of Minnesota Informed Consent to Participate form (see *Appendix E*) prior to any interviews being conducted. Total individual participants included: facility directors (PMU - 1, CSSC - 1, SBSU - 1), full-time staff members employed within the facility (PMU - 4, CSSC - 3, SBSU - 4), as well as student leaders/employees working or volunteering within the facility (PMU - 3, CSSC - 3, SBSU - 7).

Validity of findings is important to any study, and this research is no different. Careful consideration was taken throughout the process to mitigate both potential researcher bias as well as potential bias among the individual participants. The components of Maxwell's (2005) *Interactive Model of Research Design* (Diagram 3.1) served as the essence of each step along the research process. This approach lessened the likelihood of bias by providing a core group of components (framework, goals, methods, validity, and research questions) that both influence and are influenced by a number of accessory components (personal experience, participant concerns, research paradigm, and

ethical standards). For example, participants were not asked to identify their *feelings or perceptions* – rather the interview and focus group questions were carefully designed for participants to provide rich descriptions of their *actual experiences*.

Multiple site visits of the three college union facilities were conducted over the course of this study, including a minimum of two separate days on site at each campus. Visits included interviews with facility managers/directors, focus groups with the users of the facilities, a review of documents related to the design and construction of those facilities, and my own observations. These observations included spending time in several locations throughout the building – watching the interactions among individuals in the facility, their walking paths, and how they were engaging with the spaces. Prior to making campus visits, I studied information and documents from each facility that I was able to access via the Internet. This early collection of data better prepared me for the facility tour and review of documents, as well as allowed me to have greater credibility with the interview participants.

The first pieces of data were collected during an extensive walking tour of each facility. I had the opportunity to connect with an individual on each campus who was extremely knowledgeable about the facility, and I received a thorough tour of all areas including both front and back of house, kitchens, maintenance areas, loading docks, offices, event spaces, etc. I had the opportunity to see and learn about spaces that are not only out front and regularly utilized by the campus community, but also support spaces that are rarely if ever seen by the general campus population. During these tours I documented how spaces were being used, who was in them, how they were accessed, and the evident design components. Throughout the tours I kept extensive notes and amassed

a large number of photographs of the spaces I visited. I was also able to take advantage of the opportunity to collect additional qualitative data from my tour guides as we walked and talked. I spent additional time on my own walking throughout the facilities, collecting further data from observations. All told I spent between four to five hours making observations over the course of two days at each facility.

Following the facility tour, I either met individually with the facility director or with the focus group, depending on the timing at each campus. I was able to spend just over 60 minutes each interviewing the facility directors, and close to 90 minutes asking questions of the focus group participants. The questions focused on participants' own notions of physical space and its importance to community, aspects of their specific facility that are helpful in creating community, and how students make meaning of the college union community. Students provided first-hand accounts of their own notions of community, as well as ways they saw community portrayed in their facilities. Directors and staff provided their own individual accounts, but also offered observations of student behavior and their understanding of community as part of their own commentary. In order to capture the highest quality audio possible during the interviews (which in turn allowed for more accurate transcribing), a Crown PZM185 table microphone was used. This type of microphone was available to me as a rental through the University of Minnesota Duluth's Multimedia Hub. Video was recorded using a standard handheld HD camera on a tripod. Since the video was being recorded merely for a richer interpretation of participants' responses, high quality video was not necessary. Participants not willing to be recorded on video were placed in a location outside of the camera frame. The video

interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word using a headset and video playback via QuickTime.

A third component of data collection consisted of document review – specifically documents related to the design/construction process for each facility, current facility and program brochures, web pages, posters, fliers, etc. I was able to collect similar documents from each facility, which allowed me to make a more thorough and valid comparison among the three unions studied. A review of pre-design and program planning documents provided data relative to student and community-member involvement in the design process for the facilities. Evidence from planning documents included committee membership, which listed the status and title for each individual involved. Documents such as brochures, fliers, procedure manuals, and web content provided a vast amount of data regarding the mission/vision statements, current practices, services, and programs provided by each facility.

As is the nature of the PAR method, I was able to build upon each subsequent research element with each successive site visit during the study. The follow-up questions during interviews and the focus groups were more robust following my opportunity to tour the facility. The observations I made at subsequent facility visits were not only more informed, but also more critical, following my initial tours and site visits. Spending multiple days at each facility allowed for what Herr and Anderson (2005) describe as a process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting – and then repeating as necessary. I was able to insert myself into the subject, investigate what was occurring, and developed an action plan to improve upon the existing process as I moved along to the next step of my research.

The results of research are considered trustworthy when it can be demonstrated that the study has been carried out with a certain amount of rigor, and when the “quality and quantity of the evidence provided persuades the reader that the findings are trustworthy” (Merriam, 2009, p. 254). The researcher’s interpretations of the participants’ interpretations become more valid when consistencies or commonalities are revealed. A criticism of qualitative research is that the researcher may contaminate the data with their own biases or by coercing responses from participants. Rather, the PAR method suggests that the researcher should be viewed as a vessel in which the collected data may be illuminated. This is certainly true for the data gathered in this study.

The cumulative collection of site observations, interviews, and document review has created a robust body of qualitative data. Triangulating the observations of the physical spaces, along with the design documents and the richness of the interviewees’ commentary, has allowed for more valid and trustworthy conclusions to be drawn in Chapter 5 regarding the elements of community that exist in each of the facilities from the study.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

#### A Story of Three College Unions – Case Vignettes

##### *Porter Memorial Union*

Porter Memorial Union (PMU) is the central hub of activity at Alliance State University. Alliance serves its region as a public comprehensive university, enrolling just under 10,000 students. Alliance's early beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century was as a vocational technical school. Today the university is well known throughout the region for providing high quality education to students in approximately 50 undergraduate majors and nearly 25 graduate programs. The campus is nestled in a small community of nearly 20,000 residents, in an otherwise rural area of the state. Alliance is the largest employer in the area, and the local economy is greatly supported by the campus population.

**In the path of students.** The PMU, with nearly 105,000 gross square feet, employs 15 full-time staff and over 85 part-time student staff, and offers just over 11 square feet of college union space per enrolled student. The PMU houses a campus bookstore, retail and board dining outlets, a popular coffee shop, supports a student activities office, and provides space for the student newspaper, Greek life, programming board, student government, and numerous student organizations within the building. Offices, meeting rooms, and other spaces in the building are easy to locate thanks to prominent signage and clear sightlines throughout the facility. Natural light enhances the open floor plan and a wide central corridor rests in the same location as an original outdoor walking path created by students well before the building was constructed. One

staff member, whose comment was supported by another, spoke fondly of the original outdoor path and how it played a role in the design and location of the building and central corridor: “We didn’t want to change the path of the students, we wanted to BE IN the path of students.” The PMU director mentioned *path/corridor/hallway* ten times in his interview, and focus group participants referred to the terms in 16 occurrences.

The facility recently completed a full renovation, including a new addition that increased the usable space for students and the campus community. The need for a renovation was shared by many of the staff that had long tenures working in the previous facility. The PMU director summed up the sentiment quite well, “We were such a hallways-and-doors kind of building before.” The director also reiterated many times that students and members of the Alliance community were heavily involved in all aspects of the design process – from the early planning stages through final construction and into the opening – noting that the process was “always student focused, always student driven.” The director also spoke at length regarding the downtime during the renovation process saying, “When we were closed you could still have community without the physical space, but it wasn’t a lot of fun. And it wasn’t very rich. We still had events (on campus), and we still did the major programs, the orientations, the celebrations, and the banquets. But it was a lot harder and it was a lot more constrictive and it certainly wasn’t a rich community feel at the time. People missed us, as a facility.” Staff comments from the focus group interview supported this notion that the community of Alliance suffered when the building was offline during the renovation.

**A new front door.** “A front door. A very visible front door. A very open, inviting front door that provides transparency – the ability to see in and to see out.” The PMU

director talked at length about the transformation from a dark, enclosed building into a bright and vibrant facility with clear sightlines and natural light throughout the majority of spaces. Participants offered eleven distinct comments regarding the importance of natural light throughout the new building. It has been the new entrances that are credited with helping transform the personality of the newly renovated building. Two primary entrances serve as beacons to the exterior, giving visitors a clear and inviting gateway to the community within. New “front doors” can be found throughout the interior of the spaces as well. A centrally located welcome/services desk is prominent on the main floor. A large, wide opening welcomes students into the student activities space. Several small lounges are scattered throughout the central portion of the building, each wide open and inviting.

**Comfortable, at home.** Students and other campus community members appear to be at home throughout the building. Sustainability-minded, the PMU offers recycling and composting bins in addition to traditional waste receptacles, and several finishes with re-used materials throughout the facility. Many participants commented on the importance of “living in a sustainable building.” Several individual comments support the comfortable environment in the PMU: “I feel it’s a nurturing environment to work in.” “It’s really just one of the most comfortable, energetic, and fun environments I’ve ever been able to work in.” “There are spaces in the building where you feel like you’re in a community, but you’re able to have your own little spot.” “I think we have a warm environment and the natural light we have in this building is also something that makes people comfortable.” Throughout the interviews and during the tour of the building, many individuals also commented on a sense of belonging among students in the PMU.

“This is where I hang out.” “I utilize it [the union] all the time because it’s just such a good place to chill.” “This is my living room on campus.” “This is a stable environment.” “There are always people hanging out, I can always find my people here.” “We have an environment here where folks are feeling safe, and want to build on that community.” “This place sucks people in.” Instances of *comfort*, *home*, or *welcome* appear more than a dozen times in participant responses, and are supported by evidence revealed in many PMU documents.

Several students commented on how much they enjoyed running into friends or simply happening upon events as they were occurring in the building. One student was able to articulate the overall tone of those comments quite well: “There’s that randomness, that serendipity, of running into someone and that possibility of making a new friend that day. I really think that you need the physical space to be able to meet new people and see new faces.” Others talked about the space in the PMU supporting a diversity of interests that made all students feel welcome: “Having an environment where the similarities and differences in people, with different values and norms, is important to provide.” “People won’t be involved if they’re intimidated.” “I think people won’t come here unless they feel comfortable with the space.” “It’s the physical accessibility and the interpersonal accessibility...”

**Flexibility of community.** “The thing I notice most here is that you can come in and you can make the space anything you want.” Throughout the PMU students and other users have the opportunity to change the spaces to fit their discrete needs. This flexibility happens in meeting rooms and event spaces that are specifically set for each gathering, in the lounge spaces where comfortable chairs are moved around, and when student leaders

are seen promoting their organizations and/or conducting fundraisers at any number of tables set up along the ground floor corridors. Interview participants used the terms “flexible/flexibility” 17 times while describing the PMU. “The flexibility of spaces I think is a hallmark of this facility.” “The flexibility to make it a lounge space, formal banquet, or informal programs is a really great example.” “So the flexibility of that space, the warmness of the space is what makes it work.” “I think because of that flexibility we have different communities on campus that come in for that type of environment.” “Housing, who has tons of their own space, utilizes our space for its flexibility and its ability to transform and be these other things.” “That we’re so very flexible, so many different groups can come for *very* specific needs and we’re able to meet them for all those specific users.”

A multi-purpose ballroom, which can host events up to 1,200 people, is supported by a state of the art production system and is maintained by well-skilled full time and student technical staff. Dining spaces during the day become programming spaces at night, and the building exudes energy from the moment it opens until it closes at midnight. The PMU director calls it a “beehive of activity” and says that “popularity can be a challenge” when spaces become over taxed with participation. Student organizations and other groups of students can be seen meeting in the student activities office/lounge, in formal meeting rooms, or in lounge spaces where they have pushed together a number of chairs and tables.

Spaces throughout the PMU become communities within communities. One participant expressed what many individuals shared during the interviews, “So whether people are coming here for the retail or the dining, or they’re coming here for the

involvement aspect, or they're coming because they have a job here – no matter what they're coming for, it's their community." Several students and staff talked about the nooks and the special spots that could be found throughout the building: "Spaces where students, even though they're in a community and in the building where usually every student passes through, they're able to find their own little spot that is sort of unique to them." The director of PMU proudly states, "I think we created the community for students so well because everyone has their own definition of community."

### *C. Shaw Student Center*

C. Shaw Student Center (CSSC) is a focal point of community on the campus of State University–Concord. Located in a community of approximately 40,000 residents, Concord is a public comprehensive university that enrolls just over 15,000 students. Concord was originally established as a state normal school in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, later served as a four-year state teachers college, and then like many institutions following WWII, greatly expanded its enrollment and its ultimate transition to a comprehensive university. Today Concord offers nearly 150 undergraduate majors, 80 graduate programs, and a thriving online education program. The campus is the area's second largest employer, behind a regional health care system.

**Open and bright.** "Truthfully what drew me to Concord was how at home I felt on campus. And part of what did that was how open the Student Center is, and how welcoming. It's like you walk in and you just feel welcomed by everybody." Encompassing 210,000 sq. ft., translating to nearly 14 sq. ft. per student, the CSSC plays a significant community-building role for the Concord campus. Following a major

renovation/addition as well as two smaller subsequent renovations, the facility now houses the campus bookstore, bank and credit union branches, a computer store, Ucard office, counseling center, and numerous retail dining outlets, among many other services. CSSC also supports or provides space for a veteran's center, LGBT center, student government, Greek life, student organizations, and the student newspaper. Images of students and the school colors and logos can be prominently seen throughout the building. Two "main street" corridors usher students and other campus community members easily through the primary level, with an open floor plan well illuminated from ample natural light. "The building used to be very dark, there wasn't a lot of light coming through," said one participant whose comment was supported by many others. Another participant offered, "the open spaces, could have been cheaper to build maybe, but knowing that if you open everything up it does bring in more people, it does bring in community, the light brings in energy which brings in community." The openness of the CSSC was a hallmark of the focus group comments, with 18 mentions among the participants.

A large ballroom space boasts technical and production equipment that many major event centers would covet. Meeting rooms and smaller flexible event spaces dot the facility, especially along the upper floor hallways. A theatre space supports lectures, movies, and any number of large gatherings. A variety of seat types can be seen throughout the building including traditional dining tables, soft lounge seating, stackable meeting room chairs, benches, booths and high-top bar chairs. Students looking to recreate can enjoy knocking down pins at the 12-lane bowling alley or can join friends at one of the 10+ billiard tables located in the lower level. The CSSC director focused many

comments on the openness of the facility, for example, “The seating area and the building, especially on the main floor, it’s very open and inviting – when people come in they can see activity right away in some of those areas.” Another staff person commented, “You have to see and be seen. I mean, if you don’t have it you don’t have community. Having been in another building where that doesn’t exist, it’s so huge to creating community.” A student offered, “and to me, open spaces inspire and do create community.”

**Flexible, dynamic spaces.** Throughout the interviews participants continually highlighted flexibility as being a critical component to the building’s success as a community-building space. “The space that we have in the Union needs to be constantly evolving and changing.” “Being really cognizant of what the needs are, but also being responsive to space as space constantly evolves and changes.” “Anything is possible. Literally anything is possible.” “All space should be flexible, not just a specially-designed space.” The CSSC does have its limits however, several participants talked about the need for a truly 100% flexible space, like an open shell or a black/white box space. A staff member commented, “it would be awesome if we had a black box space, something that could reflect the community that we’re all engaged in.”

Comments regarding dynamic (flexible/responsive) space were not limited to the college union, or the CSSC specifically. Many participants at Concord talked about how community is shaped across their campus in residence halls, the library, a coffee shop, and even in parking lots. The CSSC director recognized this by stating, “I think it behooves us as community creators to not only stay within our walls, but to embrace those spaces and work on being custodians of the third place even when it’s outside of

our building.” And yet participant comments seemed to always return to the union, to the CSSC as being *the* place for building community on campus: “We are the third place.” “We’re the building that’s designed to be a third place.” “The word community is so intertwined with everything that we do in the union.” “I can’t imagine a campus without a student union. I can’t.”

**Dialogue and discourse.** “[The Union] is a place for dialogue and a place where you don’t have to agree. A place for discourse.” Nearly every participant involved with the interviews at CSSC had something to say about the importance of communication within community. Observations of activity throughout the day also showed a constant array of conversations – casual, formal, planned, unexpected, brief, prolonged, etc. The heart of the CSSC seems to rest with the back and forth dialogue of its community members. “Are people hanging out? Do we actually see people lingering in spaces and having conversation and dialogue? Yes we do.” “I’m already seeing where people don’t have the basic skill sets to be able to have dialogue and we can provide that.” A student leader talked about both the physical openness of the CSSC, but also the openness for free dialogue: “Because they could see what we’re doing, they could see we’re just hanging out having a normal conversation, yeah there might be some business going on, but normally we’re just hanging out having a good time talking with each other.”

The programs and activities that occur in the CSSC were universally praised for encouraging dialogue, sometimes even provoking it. While likely not the only place on the Concord campus that outwardly embraces diversity, students and staff alike noted that it was the college union on their campus where students from all backgrounds could find their place. A significantly vibrant student activities office resides on the lower level,

while a well-supported multicultural center encompasses a large suite on the upper level. Many participants commented on cross-cultural programming, and that while the opportunity existed, more intentionality was needed to truly make it happen in the CSSC: “The demographics aren’t the same anymore, we need to help create cross cultural community, when sometimes people don’t always want it to be that way.” “There is still a need for more cross-cultural programming. We do the individual culture nights or events quite well, but we’re not bringing them together with others.”

**Big C and small c.** Like many college unions, including the facilities in this study, the CSSC boasts communities within communities. One staff member’s succinct comment represents the sentiment from many individual comments collected among the interview participants: “[When] I think about community – I think it’s about the people.” With such a large physical footprint on the Concord campus, the CSSC certainly provides many opportunities for people to find their communities. *Space* and *place* were common themes throughout the participant comments, including stories of finding their own little nooks around the building – smaller communities within the larger community.

The director proudly spoke about the involvement of those many communities throughout the decision-making processes across the facility. From planning renovations, to developing policies, to planning events – the users of the facilities (the students, staff, tenants, etc.) are actively engaged in ways that allow all of their voices to be heard. A staff member made a comment about the different sizes of community during the focus group that received affirmative nods from all of the participants: “There’s the *Big C* which is a feeling of something bigger than yourself, and then there’s the *small c*. And the union has to provide both of these. Because if you don’t have the small c, there won’t

be people spending their time and energy to create the Big C. We know community is as much about space as it is about people.”

### *Shirley Bird Student Union*

Shirley Bird Student Union (SBSU) at Hearshstone State University is situated at the heart of campus, both literally and figuratively. Hearshstone, the state’s land-grant institution, serves as a public research university enrolling approximately 12,000 students majoring in over 175 fields of study. Originally established in the 1880s as an agricultural and mechanical arts school, Hearshstone now offers programs in the arts, education, STEM, human sciences, and medicine. The university is by far the largest employer in the mostly-rural region, located in a small community of approximately 25,000 residents. SBSU is also one of the largest employing departments on campus, with 29 full-time staff and 120 part-time student staff.

The building dominates the campus’ relatively flat landscape encompassing 160,000 square feet (nearly 13 square feet per student), sitting at a crossroads of major thoroughfares on campus. With significant revenues coming from leased retail space and a busy event management operation, SBSU relies on only 55% of its revenue to come from dedicated student fees. A look at their facility events schedule, priority policies for scheduling of space, and comments from the facility director all indicate that the smaller support from student fees translates into a more limited focus on students within the building. The SBSU serves its campus as a true community center, and therefore is not able to solely prioritize student needs and interests, but certainly not at a level detrimental to the students.

**Meet them where they are.** “I would say that community starts with individual interaction, and so for me community is about meeting each thing or each person or each issue with an openness and a willingness to see the dignity in what’s going on around you.” The SBSU director offers a rather profound statement about community in the Hearthstone college union. SBSU is purposefully situated as a “bridge” between the residential and academic sections of campus. Renovated three times over the last dozen years, SBSU has grown and redesigned itself along with the changing demographics of its student body. More diverse than ever before, the students are demanding programs, services, and food options that better meet their own preferences. The SBSU is uniquely equipped to serve this need for the Hearthstone campus: “We are a building of people who really care.”

A main corridor now runs the length of the ground floor, providing a high-traffic conduit of students and campus community members who pass along clearly marked offices and services. Natural light streams down from the multi-story atrium, illuminating a variety of seating types on multiple levels in the core of the building. A robust retail dining program supports eight unique food outlets, recognized by a student as being essential: “Food builds community, and I do think that food plays a part of the caring that goes on here.” Another student imagines a fictitious scenario with no college union on campus, “Where would we eat?” With nearly 40 percent of its entire building footprint devoted to food service and retail space, the leaders at SBSU understand the importance that food plays in the community lives of their students and the campus as a whole. Food is recognized as an equalizer at Hearthstone, as a destination where students, faculty, staff, and guests can come together as they are.

**Find your place.** Focus group participants spoke at length about gathering and “hangout” spaces throughout the SBSU. Among the most popular, the food outlets on campus are joined by several other community-building elements throughout the building. Eight distinct and intentionally designed fireplaces serve as hangout anchor points throughout the facility. Ample meeting rooms, a large flexible ballroom, and an in-house technical staff support the thousands of events occurring annually in the SBSU. The campus bookstore, student activities office, and information/welcome desk are each prominently located along the primary corridor. Additionally, SBSU supports space for a veteran’s center, multicultural center, student government, programming board, student newspaper, radio station, LGBT center, Greek life, and Ucard office. Old meets new in a relatively seamless transition from one newly renovated space into an older existing space.

Louvered false ceilings within the large central atrium give the building’s inhabitants a sense of space within a space, creating a more human-scale environment. Students especially commented on how much the space drew them in, and made them feel welcomed and at home. “I don’t know what else I would do if this building wasn’t here.” “Even though there might be a sense of community for people elsewhere, it’s in this building where I have found my place.” A walk-thru and observation of the SBSU spaces supports this notion of people being able to find their places throughout the building.

**Conversation on common ground.** One student offered a simple compendious synthesis of the comments others had been stating throughout the focus group: “Being able to be around people with different views, and different backgrounds, and different

areas of study – we need to have that common ground, otherwise we’ll be missing a fundamental part of the overall college experience.” Observations during the facility tour supported this notion, revealing an array of students and student organizations throughout the building, with some of them mixing and some merely co-existing. Comments collected during the site visits indicated that the mixing was important at Hearthstone and certainly more likely to happen within the SBSU: “Without a union students would just hang out with their own people, in segregated groups, because they would never be able to mix without the Union.” “One of the most important things about college is having the chance to meet people who kind of challenge you a little bit, and it happens here.” “So there’s a good dialogue among students on issues of race and of difference, not only across the country but also here. It reinforces the different efforts that we have to build community here.”

According to the focus group participants, interaction among the members of the Hearthstone campus happens as much online as it does in person. And yet the SBSU is seen as a place that encourages and supports more personal interactions: “If you go to the Union it’s almost always face to face conversations there.” “I enjoy the food and the conversation that happens between us. And I think that’s building a community in itself.” At the SBSU it is easy to see an intentionality of the space, one that creates a series of safe places for dialogue to occur, but also free of an established edict of expectations. One staff member was able to capture the essence of what many individuals shared, “You don’t get to dictate the conversations and the dialogue that happen between individuals who are building community.”

**Showing up for community.** “Everybody who walks around this building, probably around the world, everywhere you go people are tired and they’re taxed, and they’re overwhelmed. You really have to force yourself to show up. And showing up is what community is all about.” The SBSU director shared this notion when explaining their philosophy on opening the doors for the campus population, and the expectation that they have for members of the community to be active participants in their educational experience. “You can’t just say *‘I love community, I want community, I want inclusion, I want to be included.’* You have to go out and include somebody, you have to go out and welcome somebody, you have to feed somebody, you have to do those things – and that’s community.”

Throughout the building one can see students and other community members literally showing up and engaging with each other, as well as with the programs and operations of the facility itself. The “crossroads” effect of the main corridor serves to bring people together from distinct parts of campus, pulling them into the community environment, and into interactions with each other.

#### *Shared Characteristics of PMU, CSSC, and SBSU*

All three campuses on which these college unions reside share common characteristics, illustrated in Table 4.1. The three facilities were also carefully analyzed for common characteristics, and Table 4.2 represents a list of characteristics shared by all three of the facilities themselves. It is these shared characteristics that will ultimately allow for greater generalizability of the outcomes and recommendations for practice presented in the analysis that follows in Chapter 5.

*Table 4.1 – Common Characteristics Among Campuses in the Study*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upper Midwest</li> <li>• Residential</li> <li>• 4-year Public, Selective</li> <li>• Enrollment: 9,500-15,500</li> <li>• Enrollment profile: high undergraduate</li> <li>• Setting: urban (not metropolitan)</li> <li>• City population under 50,000</li> <li>• City located in otherwise rural area</li> <li>• Student population is 75%+ white</li> </ul>
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*Table 4.2 – Common Characteristics Among Facilities in the Study*

<b>Retail/Service:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bookstore</li> <li>• Coffee Shop</li> <li>• Dining Outlets</li> <li>• Info/Welcome Desk</li> </ul>	<b>Offices:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities Office</li> <li>• Event Scheduling</li> <li>• In-House Tech</li> <li>• Administration</li> </ul>	<b>Student Organizations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greek Life</li> <li>• Student Government</li> <li>• Student Newspaper</li> <li>• Programming Board</li> </ul>
Multiple fireplaces	Open staircases	Prominent natural light
Event capacity 1,200+	Images of students	“Main Street” corridor
School colors are prominent	Clear and easy to see signage	Variety of seating types
Employs 75+ students	Student leadership positions	Student org. tabling area
Students involved in planning	Visual connection b/w floors	Lounge space 10,000+ sq ft

**Distillation of Findings**

The triangulation of data from observations, interviews, and document review provided an extensive qualitative data set. Thorough review and careful coding of all information was necessary to discern common patterns among the data at the outset of analysis. The review and coding process proved to be the most daunting task of the

research, but also brought forth the foundation for the ultimate findings in this study. A rather lengthy set of patterns emerged across all research points among the data collected from the three cases. Using a deeper analysis, the patterns were refined and then incorporated into a set of 15 relationships, as best indicated from the collected data. A re-review of all data and a final refinement of the relationships allowed for the emergence of five universal elements of community in college unions, an analysis of which is provided in Chapter 5.

### *Emerging Patterns of Community*

The patterns revealed in this study provide a window into the early identification of common elements and themes of community found among all three college union facilities. The data from the interviews, focus groups, site observations, and documents was coded for similarities, differences, and frequencies. A set of basic patterns (71 in total) was identified from across all three college unions in the study. While the majority of patterns can be identified universally, not every pattern appears prominently in each college union case. Many patterns emerged with regular frequency across all data points and include: *students, space, place, gather, involvement, openness, path, hangout, welcome, and flexibility*. These patterns appear prominently in facility documents, in the transcripts from the interviews and focus groups, and throughout the physical spaces themselves. The literature review from Chapter 2 also supports the existence of these patterns. A complete list of patterns in order of prominence appears in Appendix F.

### *Refined Relationships*

The patterns remain much too narrow, especially individually, to be considered the ultimate findings of this study. Therefore the patterns themselves were carefully coded again and reviewed for logical connections; patterns not appearing in each of the three cases were eliminated prior to this process. From the remaining pattern data, a broader inventory of relationships (15 in total) has been identified in Table 4.3 in their order of prominence, based on their frequency among the data. The refined relationships begin to provide a clearer picture of how: 1) students make meaning of community (also supported by staff responses), and 2) how the community manifests itself throughout the college union cases.

*Table 4.3 – Refined Relationships*

Relationship Name (additional included patterns)
1. Space/Place
2. Student-centered (stakeholders, students)
3. Interaction/Connection (gather)
4. Hangout/Lounge (home, living room, linger)
5. Open/Inviting (natural light, lighting, transparency, visual connection)
6. Environment/Warmth (nooks, social)
7. Leadership/Activity (networking, program)
8. Involvement/Engagement
9. Food/Coffee
10. Evolve/Change (future, maintenance)
11. Crossroads/Path (main street)
12. Flexibility/Variety
13. Conversation/Listen (dialogue, teach)
14. Welcome/Comfort (culture)
15. Entrance/Signage (info desk)

### *Key Elements of Campus Community*

The relationships were further analyzed – both within each individual facility as well as across all three facilities studied. A thorough review of all data sets, the identified patterns, and the broader refined relationships revealed a number of fundamental aspects (or themes) of community that appear throughout the three college union cases. In other words, five key elements of community have been identified from the award-winning facilities of the Porter Memorial Union, C. Shaw Student Center, and Shirley Bird Student Union. It is these five key elements of community, illustrated later in Table 5.1, that serve as the basis for the final analysis discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

### **Summary**

The patterns, relationships, and elements uncovered in this study have several implications for practitioners, designers, and future research. The final chapter of this study provides an analysis of the key elements, limitations, and recommendations for future practice. In their book on mission and place, Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney (2005) state “a vital college creates the spaces where people can meet in a friendly way, where free interchange and discussion of ideas are fostered” (p. 48). The authors go on to assert, “public areas foster a sense of community – a feeling of unity and belonging with one’s fellows at the university” (p. 44). The data gathered relative to the college union in this qualitative study clearly support these notions. Community does exist in the college union, and is enhanced and created by both its users (students, faculty, staff, guests) and those who direct the facility (staff, student leaders, administrators). Place does matter to community, and community matters to the place it inhabits. Chapter 5 provides the story

of the universe of the three college union case studies, answering the question: What does it mean to build community within these college unions?

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **Overview of the Study**

This study focused on the college union facility found on traditional, public, mid-size, residential campuses as a venue to study physical space and community in higher education. The college union is a compelling venue to discuss physical space and community for many reasons. Historically, college unions have served as the hearthstone of campus life (Butts, 1971; Hatton, et al., 2013). Many unions still serve this purpose, although the contemporary union environment typically provides space and programming for various communities of students (and faculty/staff), rather than serving merely as a central gathering space for all (*Role of the College Union*, 1996). As noted earlier in this paper, recently renovated and/or constructed college unions have been formally recognized for their success related to community building (Facility Design Awards, 2014). In relation to community, the high marks granted to award-winning facilities have emphasized the following: 1) how the planning and design process involved students and the campus community, 2) aspects of the campus community's goals that helped shape the physical layout of the building, and 3) how the uses of space have supported building community and student learning.

Utilizing information from eleven years worth of college unions that have received the ACUI Facility Design Award, a substantial population of facilities was identified for this study. An opportunity existed to identify common elements across this population, although practicality necessitated selecting a sample of three of the facilities

to use as case studies. Relying on earlier literature related to college unions and community as a starting point, this study sought to identify common elements that exist among highly rated college unions, as well as test common elements/trends that have been identified in previous studies (Hatton, et al., 2013; Rudisille and Hickey, 2011; Hyde and Sanchez, 2010; Hatton, et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2005). The research questions from Chapter 1 and the conceptual framework from Chapter 3 guided the process.

The approach for this study was one of basic qualitative research: collecting data via observations, interviews, and document review among three college unions. Since the subject being studied is bounded (the college union facility), and the desired outcomes of this study include informing future practice, a case study approach using the participatory action research (PAR) method was most appropriate. Including multiple cases required the study of individual cases first, followed by a deeper analysis across cases, which will allow for greater external validity of the findings. The primary principles of this research method are detailed in Chapter 3.

### **Making Meaning of Community**

The literature reviewed previously in this paper reveals a number of ways in which individuals and groups perceive community, both from within and from without. Research Question #1 of this study sought to identify specific ways in which *students* make meaning of community, most notably in the context of the college union. The data collected in this study do just that – they provide a window of knowledge into the campus community lived in and experienced by students.

Based on my 20 years of experience as a student affairs professional, I anticipated that I would uncover the terms “belong” or “matter” from the participants, especially considering the prevalence of these terms from the available literature. It is interesting to note that a search through the entire body of transcripts reveals the word “belong” appeared only one time, and “matter” did not appear at all. The terms did appear once or twice in each of the document reviews I conducted. While scholars may consider the terms *belonging* or *mattering* to be essential definers of community, especially on college campuses, my study did not reveal the use of these terms, especially when students defined their own meaning of community. Rather, students and the staff that serve the campus population predominantly referred to the concepts of *gathering*, *interaction*, *conversation*, or *connectedness* as essential to community in their college unions. The connections, the conversations, the interactions, and the gatherings – it is through these lenses that the participants in this study make meaning of their community vis-à-vis belonging or mattering. I interpret this to mean that students seek a two-way experience rather than merely a comfortable, safe, or welcoming space that might otherwise suffice for a sense of belonging or mattering. The concept of providing this two-way experience is at the heart of the five key elements of community discussed in the upcoming section.

Universally in this study, however, students offered comments that related to finding their own community within the larger community – a sense of a welcoming environment where they could be themselves (i.e. the Big C/small c concept illustrated in the CSSC vignette). While students referred to it in different ways, their thoughts and comments spoke to the same single theme – being able to *find their spot*: “I think it’s a group of people who have a lot of shared interests and are able and want to help support

each other. We come together here because it feels welcoming, it's our place here.”

“Even the people that come into the building that aren't active, maybe in the student organizations and everything, they still make connections here. We all find our own little spot.” One student told a story about how their organization exclusively used the PMU for their promotions and events because they did not fear their message would be silenced or judged: “I mean, where else could you have a Bisexual Bake Sale and only receive such a positive response!?” The relative comfort of this student and their organization to find their spot in the PMU is what helped make it a community for them. This same notion of welcome and comfort – of finding one's spot – is supported by the findings from this study, as well as the literature reviewed previously (Schlossberg, 1989; Astin, 1993; Berger, 1997; Kuh et al., 2005; Harris, 2006-07). This concept is interpreted from the research presented here in a way that better fits with the literature on belonging and mattering, and therefore remains an important component to community.

It is this welcoming environment that can be a common ground for all comers. The concept of common ground permeates the focus group comments, which are in turn supported by the material found throughout the facility documents. Missions and visions of the three college unions each share statements about being open to the entire campus community, providing welcoming gathering spaces, and being an intentionally inclusive environment. Pre-design and design documents related to the renovations among the three college unions offer an insight into how university leaders and designers were thinking about the importance of a *common ground community* before, during, and after the construction process. Statements collected from the union directors support the common ground information found in the documents, which are in turn supported by the

collection of observations made by students in the focus groups.

From the early beginnings of the college union, practitioners have referred to the facility itself as the “living room” of campus. In fact, I have used this expression myself many times in campus addresses, staff and student trainings, and with my professional colleagues. As with belonging and mattering, I anticipated the living room theme would permeate the qualitative responses, and yet it was practically non-existent throughout all three components of data collection. The use of “living room,” at least in the context of this study, should be considered a more traditional (i.e. outdated) expression. The concepts of *home*, *inclusive*, *access*, or *warmth* are considered more contemporary, appearing prominently throughout the data. Again, it is these concepts that allow students and other users of the college union to make meaning of their community.

Employment/involvement is another important aspect of community-making in the college union. The roles that students play in our college unions, whether they are compensated or voluntary, are significant in how individuals view themselves within a community. Each student involved with the focus groups consistently referenced the importance of their employment/volunteer role in relation to how they made meaning of community. In the introduction of his book regarding student employment, Perozzi (2009) supports student learning as an underlying objective of on-campus employment: “[given] the core function of higher education and the demonstrable value of the collegiate experience, it makes sense that student employment be embraced as a central tenant in students’ development” (p. ix). Frigo (1997) takes this notion further, supporting the college union as the central organization on college campuses responsible for providing meaningful employment *and* developmental opportunities for students. In

Frigo's understanding, the aspects of professional student involvement – whether paid or voluntary – constitute an important connection to their college union and/or campus community. In this study of college unions and community, students self-identified many of their own and their peers' roles in the college union including: leaders of student organizations, student government, Greek chapters, tech staff, dining workers, cashiers, tour guides, and so on. One participant offered a succinct summarization of many other comments: "It's a strong student staff support team that we have too. Without the student staff we wouldn't be able to...this building wouldn't be able to function." It is their college union that students credit with providing the support for these roles, and for encouraging students to actively engage with each other and their community. Students overwhelmingly praised their college union for providing for them what they were unable to find anywhere else on campus – a true sense of connectedness, a place to call home, a community.

The terms *tradition*, *loyalty*, and *culture* appeared in total nearly 50 times in the data, and were prominently used by the focus group participants. Collectively, these terms translate to a sense of pride that the case study participants have with their college union, a manner in which they see and understand community for themselves. Students spoke eloquently about being intentionally engaged with their college union, both in the day-to-day activities and the processes that govern the overall operation. Students from all three cases were especially proud of the attention to detail that had been paid not only to the design of their facilities, but also the design of the programs and services: "It was very apparent to me that the attention to detail had taken place in this building." "Intentional design is a consistent theme, you can create a space that's warm, engaging,

yet versatile. It helps create that community.” “Bringing the pride back into [the Union] helps bring the community.” It is this sense of pride among students that gives them a feeling of community, a connection to a place that is deeper and longer lasting than simply passing by or merely existing temporarily in a space. Two excerpts from the documents reviewed in this study encapsulate this notion: “Our enduring goal is to connect the [Union] more deeply to more people.” “The [Union] endeavors to connect students to the [University] throughout their college experience and beyond.” The college unions in this study seek to instill traditions with the student body, student leadership, and the overall campus community. Tradition, loyalty, and pride are further aspects of community that clearly resonate with students, and help tie them to their communities.

### **Five Key Elements of College Unions Evident in Campus Community**

Uncovering new knowledge from multiple sources across multiple cases required the development of patterns, relationships, and themes (referred to as *key elements* in this study) to aid in the synthesis of the data. Porter Memorial Union (PMU) at Alliance State University, C. Shaw Student Center (CSSC) at State University–Concord, and Shirley Bird Student Union (SBSU) at Hearshstone State University all share key elements of community. Pattern, relationship, and theme names can come from multiple sources including the researcher, the participants, or from within the literature (Merriam, 2009). For this study, the pattern and relationship names (and subsequent five key elements detailed in the following sections) were developed from my own interpretation of the data, including cues from participant responses, on-site observations, and the review of documents and pertinent literature. The following analysis seeks to answer Research

Question #2 by identifying elements that contribute to community in the college union setting.

Subsequent to the distillation of data into patterns and the patterns into relationships, five key elements emerged. The discovered common elements evident in campus community across the three college union cases are:

- Student-Centered
- Dynamic Spaces
- Pathways to Success
- College is a Conversation
- House of Serendipity

These themes are summarized below and depicted in Table 5.1.

### *Student-Centered*

It is no wonder that the PMU, CSSC, and SBSU have each been recognized as highly rated community-building facilities that support student learning and interaction. The intentional involvement of students as well as other university community members appears throughout the pre-planning, pre-design, and design documents related to the renovation and construction projects for each of these facilities. At each step of the way, users of the facilities had opportunities to shape the discussions and the plans that culminated in completed building projects. Comments among all three directors from the college union cases support the information gathered from the documents – each individual reiterated how important it was to involve members of their community (especially students) in the decision-shaping process. Kuh, et al., (1991) recognize this student involvement as one of the hallmarks of highly successful colleges.

Programs and services provided by these three college unions are specifically designed to engage students outside of the traditional classroom setting. The unions serve as laboratories of learning, as places where students can actively practice the skills they are learning, and where the blending of formal and informal education occurs. The vision and goal statements for these facilities support this out-of-class learning, by referring to their buildings as: a living room, a hearthstone, a laboratory; as well as where lifelong learning is forged, where students develop personal and professional skills, and where an environment is developed for intentional learning.

Previous research suggests that users (in these three college union cases, primarily students) are able to shape and be shaped by their environment, that place attachment can have a significant effect on members of a community, and that the environment should therefore be responsive to their needs (Solheid, 2014; Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001; Whyte, 1988; Rullman and van den Kieboom, 2012). The college unions in this study are clearly responsive to the needs of their students, and also proactively engage them in all aspects of programming and operations. Additional indicators of student-centeredness from these college union cases include: images of students throughout the building, students are empowered in employment and leadership roles, students have their feet up on the couches, they feel comfortable dominating all areas with their conversations, and student organizations are given ample support space and resources.

The role of the student-centered college union goes as far back as the first college unions themselves, even before they were housed in formal structures. A concise history of college unions as community organizations/spaces for students is summarized earlier in Chapter 1. The vast majority of college unions today are supported in some manner by

mandatory student fees, many of which receive a large portion of their overall annual operating budgets from such fees (Knell and Latta, 2006). The unions studied here are no different, with significant portions of their budgets coming from fees paid directly by students: PMU – 88%, CSSC – 80%, and SBSU – 55%. With student fee support comes the expectation that the buildings be centered on students, and without a doubt the successful community-building college unions in this study do just that.

### *Dynamic Spaces*

Human-scale environments foster interaction among community members, mitigate stress, and are more likely to encourage the flexible use of space. The size and scope of a space can have significant impact on the people inhabiting it (Whyte, 1980), and places become significant on college campuses because they give off messages or meaning about the institution (Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney, 2005). The spaces within those places in turn imbue meaning to the community; meaning that can be perceived as positive, neutral, negative, or anywhere along the spectrum of human emotion. The data presented in this study indicate that dynamic space – space that can easily be altered, for it to adapt over time, for it to remain flexible and accommodating, and be responsive to student and other user needs – is an important element of community resilience. An illustrative example of the emphasis on dynamic spaces is the quote by the SBSU director who said, “Building community and maintaining a good community is also being somewhat fluid and making changes as they are needed. This university and the culture of this campus is that we’re supportive and growing to meet the needs of the community.”

As campuses grow and change, so do their curricular methods and the population(s) they serve. When new needs develop our campus spaces must be ready to be responsive to the changes, be willing to adapt to those needs, and be prepared to change again as the cycle repeats. As educational models change, the processes for creating spaces must change as well. No longer can campuses afford to dedicate one building for one function, one program type, one department, or one college. A mix of furniture types and sizes throughout the three college unions in this study are rarely, if ever, fixed to a floor or wall. Meeting, lounge, and event spaces do not typically come with pre-set configurations, are regularly reviewed for functionality, and are designed to be bright and inviting rather than dark and closed off.

Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney (2005) additionally assert that a campus should respond directly to its physical setting; that its form, its spaces, and the function of its design should be responsive to and in harmony with each other. The same concept has been revealed in this study regarding college unions' obligation to be dynamic in their form and function. College unions must remain responsive and flexible, in a manner much more so than might be achieved in other campus facilities. "On many campuses today, projects are carried out to meet discrete needs – more classroom space, more parking, a new student center – until the overall sense of unity and harmony on the campus as a whole is destroyed. Campus leaders, planners, architects, and landscape architects need to help institutions reveal the connection between their visions and their campus as they help these institutions grow" (Kenney, et al., p. 31).

The concept of providing dynamic (flexible/responsive) college union spaces is not novel. Following the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the college union movement,

Butts (1966) compiled and published a book of multi-use planning strategies that had already been employed in college unions. In the mid to late 1960s (and even before), college unions were facing significant pressure to change from an older traditional model, into a more modern building and program to better meet the needs of contemporary students. The examples shared in the multi-use publication provide a framework and basis for college union expansion and/or adaptation – strategies of interactions similar to what has been validated in this study. In a recent dissertation reviewing utilization of the college union by community college transfer students, Reif (2014) recommends, “If the college union is a place where interactions occur, administrators need to pay attention to the physical layout and aesthetics within these areas” (p. 42). Interactions do occur in the college union, quite meaningful ones, and the literature and results of this study have indicated this to be true. For interactions to remain engaging and ongoing, college unions need to be responsive to the needs of their community – “This idea of ever-changing space can keep activities dynamic and interesting” (Solheid, 2014, p. 15). Dynamism is therefore a critical component of the successful community-building college union.

### *Pathways to Success*

“The more that people’s paths cross and intersect, the more a campus feels like a community and a place to be cherished” (Kenney, et al., p. 81). As campuses have grown in size and scope, the single pathway with a mix of uses has given way to a crisscross of hallways, sidewalks, and roads – each leading to a destination farther away from the central hub of community. As cities and towns have done the same, the desire to return to a vibrant downtown and main street has been an important factor in rebuilding

community. Similar to the civic rebirth of downtowns, the college union can serve as the *main street* function for colleges and universities – centralizing programs and services that might otherwise be spread across disparate locations on campus. At SBSU for example, the union is known for “open doors and open minds” and provides a primary corridor through the building known as Main Street. According to the SBSU director, this intentional creation of Main Street has revolutionized the way people think of and use the union, inviting a collaboration of ideas that was not prevalent prior to the renovation. Referring to the university campus as a whole, Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney (2005) support this concept of access to collaboration via pathways: “The layout of the campus – including the adjacency and proximity of programs – can foster the exposure and interactions that lead to successful interdisciplinary collaboration, or it can stymie them” (p. 29). Certainly the buildings at the PMU, CSSC, and SBSU are fostering interactions, rather than stymieing them. Intentional design of major corridors that are bright and open, teeming with activity, and that are well maintained in the interest of students – this is a pathway to success for community.

In her recent dissertation regarding the role of physical space and community on campus, Harrington (2015) reports, “students experience a strong sense of community in outdoor spaces, student organization offices, and through co-curricular activities” (p. 76-77). It is these spaces in college unions, in addition to lounges and dining areas, where students are most likely to actively interact with one another. But how do they come upon these spaces? What route do they take? The college unions in this study each provide human-scale environments, highlighted by Manning and Kuh (2005) as being the type of spaces that create pathways to participation, and which ultimately lead to student success.

For students to come upon important spaces, the path needs to be clear. Exterior and interior entrances among the three unions in this study are bright, visually appealing, and seem to invite participation. Corridors, offices, meeting rooms, student organization spaces, lounges, etc. are clearly marked and free from obstructions that would otherwise block transparency into the spaces.

Not unlike the Porter Memorial Union example illustrated in Chapter 4, Strange and Banning (2001) note that some campus designs rely on installing formal pathways only *after* students have established their walking patterns. The authors go on to state: “The welcoming entrance does not cause entry, but the probability of entry can be increased with proper design” (p. 14). “As pedestrians walk around campus they encounter nonverbal messages embedded in buildings, pathways, signs, and symbols. Through the decoding of these nonverbal messages, they learn important cultural messages conveyed by planners, designers, builders, and even the users of the pedestrian space” (p. 26). Rather than make capriciously devised pathways, great community-building college unions like the three in this study provide pathways that match the routes required by students. Brightly lit corridors guide people into the spaces they seek, while open and inclusive opportunities give students pathways for involvement and leadership. It is the users of the space who can best plan for and guide how it will be most effectively utilized.

### *College is a Conversation*

*Community cannot exist in the absence of public space that supports communication.* (Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney, 2005, p.56).

In his 1999 inaugural address at the University of Indianapolis, President Jerry Israel outlined a theme of his presidency: *College is a Conversation* (Holmes, 1999). Israel shared with the audience – comprised of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community leaders – that effective communication was essential to the educational experience. He outlined a strategic plan that called for new academic initiatives, additional community-building spaces on campus (including an expanded student center and a new residence hall), and the breakdown of administrative silos that thwarted meaningful dialogue on campus. Faculty and staff were encouraged and expected to think more collaboratively, both across and within their disciplines. Additional resources were dedicated for the creation of enhanced co-curricular experiences, and students were both challenged and supported to engage with their learning through activities such as civic engagement, student organizations, study abroad, leadership programs, and off-campus internships. Whether President Israel realized it at the time or not, he was describing the college union.

It is this *college is a conversation* notion that permeates the data collected from the cases in this study. In their research on mission and place in the context of a university campus, Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney (2005) support conversation as a critical component of the campus: “A vital college creates the spaces where people can meet in a friendly way, where free interchange and discussion of ideas are fostered” (p. 48). And, “conversation is the backbone of community and personal growth; and the

campus environment should be designed to nurture it” (p. 54). Solheid (2014) goes on to note in her study that, “conversation is the sustaining activity of any good place of community” (p. 18). The college unions from this research study offer many such places throughout their facilities.

My study revealed the importance of *college is a conversation* in several ways throughout the data, beginning with my first visits to the Porter Memorial Union, C. Shaw Student Center, and Shirley Bird Student Union. Initial observations revealed conversations occurring in the hallways, in lounges, at dining tables, in study groups, in offices, and simply among and across groups of students and others. During more intentional observation sessions I was able to watch and listen to conversations that were academically focused, some that were purely social, and others that clearly had great significance to the conversation participants. Focus group members from all three college unions talked about the importance of conversation and dialogue as part of their involvement and connection with their college union community. A student who works at the CSSC told a brief story that represented comments from other students quite well: “My friends didn’t use to come here, they didn’t know what was going on at the student center. But they started coming to see me while I was working here, connecting with other students and seeing so many things in action and students talking to each other and even with staff. Now they are active in stuff here all of the time!”

For true inclusive conversations to occur, a college union must not only be welcoming to, but also provide programs and services for, a diverse student and community population. The Porter Memorial Union is a significantly smaller building at 105,000 sq. ft. than the C. Shaw or Shirley Bird buildings, which are 210,000 and

160,000 sq. ft. respectively. With the smaller size comes a limit to the number of offices and services that can be accommodated within the PMU. While the CSSC and SBSU buildings house support offices for veterans and international students, as well as an LGBT center and multicultural center – those services are located elsewhere on the Alliance campus, rather than being located inside the PMU. The absence of these offices could have an impact on how students perceive and/or engage with their community at Alliance and within the PMU. It should be noted, however, that students served by those offices are supported via active student organizations and event support within the PMU. The students and staff from the focus group acknowledged this fact, and spoke very favorably regarding the supportive and inclusive environment within their union. In other words PMU participants did not miss these formal offices in their building, likely because the programmatic support provided everything that they needed beyond the brick and mortar space itself.

### *House of Serendipity*

The findings from this study suggest that college unions need to offer varied and exciting elements of campus life as well as necessary services if they are to be true community builders. This will manifest as new opportunities for students to interact with one other in ways that may not have been initially intended – in other words, a thoughtful, planned serendipity for the university community. C. Shaw Smith, former ACUI president and union director at Davidson College, spoke eloquently on this notion of serendipity throughout his career. In one of his earliest iterations, he received a standing ovation in front of 225 attendees following his *Union Philosophy* address at the

1960 ACUI Region 8 Conference in Wichita, KS: “The Union is and always should be a house of serendipity – a gift of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for” (Region 8, 1960, p. 4).

We know from the literature that the physical environment can have a significant impact on human behavior (Whyte, 1980; Banning and Bryner, 2001; Kenney, et al., 2005). Strange and Banning (2001) take this understanding even further when they note that people take cues from their environment, cues that influence both the energy and the attitude of people in a space, including their willingness to linger or move along. Workshop Architects, among other designers noted for their community-building expertise, refer to this attraction of lingering (or lack thereof) as how “sticky” a space becomes. Earlier research by Kuh, et al. (1991) supports this environmental attraction to space as well, emphasizing:

*Interaction among community members is fostered by the availability of indoor and outdoor spaces where people can come together without much effort. Institutions should consider whether their campuses have adequate places that encourage spontaneous, informal interaction among students. Examples include: residence hall and union areas that encourage impromptu interaction, such as lounges with comfortable furniture, wide hallways, and side stairwells; and meeting facilities with space dividers that permit the creation of small, quiet gathering spaces (p. 309).*

My own study of the three unions gave strength to the *house of serendipity* theme in several ways, illustrated below.

Focus group participants talked at length about how they did not always know what the day was going to be like for them in their college union. A staff member at CSSC commented, “I like that there’s no day that’s the same as any other day. I come in with a proposed agenda, as to what I think the day’s going to look like, and it’s constantly

evolving and changing – and it can happen on the turn of a dime.” A student at the PMU offered, “there’s that randomness, that serendipity, of running into someone and that possibility of making a new friend that day. I really think that you need the physical space to be able to meet new people and see new faces.” One college union in the study actually refers to itself as a house of serendipity, including information on their website and throughout their documents about the experiences they provide that offer “more than was expected.” Another of the three unions boasts how it “fosters spontaneous interaction,” and a third states that it “increases students’ opportunities for co-curricular involvement and increases their interaction with others” via both planned and spontaneous programs and activities. Two of the college unions provide meeting space that can be reserved on the spot, without a prior reservation. And all three unions offer lounge space in excess of 10,000 square feet, and freely allow (and expect) furniture to be moved and adjusted as needed by students each day. The serendipity of the college union is what makes it a unique building on campus, a place where students and others can happen upon programs, services, events, or just each other. Table 5.1 summarizes each of these five themes and corresponding elements evident in campus community.

*Table 5.1 – Five Key Elements of College Unions Evident in Campus Community*

<b>Element</b>	<b>Aspects Evident in Campus Community</b>
Student-Centered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are involved in planning processes, especially projects with long-term impact</li> <li>• Student voices are included during policy-making</li> <li>• Students are given positions of leadership throughout the facility – both in volunteer and compensated roles</li> <li>• Students are able to see images of “themselves” throughout the building</li> <li>• Programs and services are specifically designed to engage students in a practical environment, outside of the classroom</li> <li>• Mission, vision, and goal statements are inclusive of all students</li> </ul>
Dynamic Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spaces are intentionally designed to be flexible, especially furniture and fixtures</li> <li>• Meeting &amp; event spaces do not have a “pre-set” configuration</li> <li>• A variety of space types and sizes exists, including a mixture of seat types and styles</li> <li>• Spaces are regularly reviewed for their viability and functionality, are flexible, and change accordingly</li> <li>• Spaces invite people to interact and/or to linger</li> </ul>
Pathways to Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exterior and interior entrances invite participation; there is a visual connection between floors</li> <li>• Natural light and additional lighting is abundant throughout the building</li> <li>• Primary floors, corridors, and stairways are open and provide transparency from one space to the next</li> <li>• Corridors serve as a “crossroad” not only for the building, but for the campus as well</li> <li>• Signage is clear and prominent throughout the building</li> <li>• The facility is clean and well-maintained</li> </ul>
College is a Conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for dialogue are invited through intentional program planning</li> <li>• Spaces for a diverse student population are provided (organization offices, centers, services, etc.)</li> <li>• Human-scale environments exist in hallways, entries, dining areas, etc. fostering more intimate conversation</li> <li>• An environment is fostered where ideas, opinions, cultural norms, etc. are encouraged and embraced</li> <li>• Students and community members are challenged with new ways of thinking, acting, speaking, or listening</li> </ul>
House of Serendipity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for engagement and interaction rest in every corner of the building</li> <li>• Students and other community members can easily see and be seen throughout the building</li> <li>• Services and access to information reside off of main corridors and are easy to locate or happen upon</li> <li>• All members of the community are actively invited to participate and feel welcome in the space</li> <li>• Food and drink are abundant in the building, providing opportunities for both planned and spontaneous interaction</li> </ul>

### *Connections Among the Elements*

The five key elements of college unions evident in campus community do not stand in isolation from one another, but rather rely on important connections among each other to strengthen their own presence. A story of campus community is woven across the five elements, a story that both informs and is influenced by how students and other campus members make meaning of community in their college unions. The flexibility and responsiveness of space from the *dynamic spaces* element has a strong connection to the *serendipity* element – one needs the other to be fully realized. For a space or a program to be truly dynamic, policies or practices should not impede the opportunity for spontaneous planning. Nor should serendipity be thwarted by individuals or fixtures in the building that remain inflexible or unresponsive. Likewise, in order for effective *pathways to success* to properly exist in the college union, the facility must remain *student-centered* in all that it offers. The union must also provide avenues for inclusive *conversation* and dialogue, or the pathways may be limited or outright closed for some members of the university community.

The connections among the five elements are not arbitrary, nor are they inconsequential. The successful college union, certainly one that espouses effective community-building as its primary purpose, will need to successfully weave the five elements throughout its design, operation, and program. College union practitioners, student leaders, staff, faculty, and other university community members will need to understand and embrace the five key elements. With this in mind, important lessons for college union practitioners follow in the recommendations for practice.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

Action science, akin to the action research performed here, is most notably associated with the business theorist Chris Argyris who, among other interests, studied how organizations have the ability to learn. The goal of action science, according to Argyris, is “the generation of knowledge that is useful, valid, descriptive of the world, and informative of how we might change it” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 14). The data collected from the three college union cases in this study, including the distilled patterns and relationships, ultimately result in the identification of five key elements of college unions evident in campus community. The elements illustrated here provide new knowledge that is not only valid, but also useful for college union practitioners. The intent of action research, which guided the study presented in this paper, is defined by Herr and Anderson (2005) as, “[being] oriented to some action or cycle of actions that organizational or community members have taken, are taking, or wish to take to address a particular problematic situation” (p. 3-4). The *problematic situations* faced by college union professionals are as varied as the buildings themselves and the students they serve, and could accordingly constitute numerous dissertation and other research topics. The recommendations that follow are crafted in specific response to the findings of this particular study, and are meant to inform practitioners regarding campus community and the college union.

As noted earlier in this paper the purpose of the study is to understand how highly rated unions make meaning of community, as well as the identification of common elements of college unions evident in campus community. A secondary intent of the study is to provide recommendations that practitioners can use when building or

developing facilities that are purposefully community-centered. The following section provides practical recommendations for the future practice of design professionals, college union leaders, and the Association of College Unions International.

### *Design Professionals*

As in most professions, architects and designers have a fiduciary duty to their clients – they must apply a degree of care, skill, and consideration to the work they provide. The relationship between the design professional and the university is a critical one, and can have lasting effects. Lessons learned from this study provide direct recommendations to professionals who work with universities, specifically in the design of community building spaces like the college union. First and foremost designers must understand that their client is the *entire* campus community – the students, faculty, staff, and others who inhabit the spaces on a daily basis – not solely the vice president for finance, or the dean, or the board of trustees. Strange and Banning (2001) ask how campus designs can enhance a sense of community, and which physical features create a sense of community. This study provides answers to that question, providing specific approaches in which campus designers can enhance that sense of community.

Herr and Anderson (2005) offer guidance to the researcher engaged in action research: “The researcher engaged in the pursuit of practical interest employs interpretive methodologies in an effort to provide understanding of a given situation. Consequently, interpretative understanding seeks to generate knowledge that informs and guides practical judgments” (p.27). Designers involved with college union renovation or construction projects should heed this same guidance. A facility that is successful in

building community will become so only after architects and designers have successfully interpreted the specific needs and culture of a campus and its students, incorporating the necessary elements into the final design. This intentional effort of an increased understanding will allow for more informed decisions, and ultimately result in campus spaces that are more responsive to their communities.

The findings contained herein support what we know from Rullman and van den Kieboom (2012) that, “physical place matters for student learning, for the creation of community, and for meeting higher education’s civic mission” (p. 190). Given that physical space matters, the findings therefore suggest that design professionals should account for the five key elements of community when embarking on new college union projects. Specifically, designers will need to work carefully to engage a broader representation of campus stakeholders throughout the design process, rather than merely gather information from a small number of campus leaders. Spaces that are dynamic and responsive, that invite conversation, and that allow for spontaneity of activity will need to permeate their designs. A large, bright, and open environment will need to be matched with human-scale offerings such as small nooks for quiet studying, quaint gathering spots, as well as spaces for more intimate conversation. The elements of college unions evident in campus community illustrated in Table 5.1, including the corresponding aspects, serve as an informative template for designers who seek successful community-building projects. It is important to note, however, that the efforts of designers must be intentional and must be genuine. Endeavors that only give the key elements a cursory consideration will result in a superficial process, one that may not uncover or provide the necessary elements of community.

### *College Union Leaders*

The facilities and programs of a college union should be a reflection of the campus' mission, resulting in the creation of a common sense of community (Reif, 2014; Barrett, 2014). Many of today's college union leaders are up against what Schon (1983) refers to as dynamic conservatism. History and tradition often pull practitioners back to a status quo – to a *we have always done it this way* mentality – especially when major decisions are on the line. Herr and Anderson (2005) assert, “action research can either reproduce [those] norms, rules, skills, and values or it can challenge them. However, practitioners intuitively know that when they challenge the norms, the institutions' dynamic conservatism will respond in a defensive, self-protective manner” (p. 24). The facility directors and staff across each of the three cases studied here offer similar stories of pitting themselves against long-established campus norms and cultures (and people), at times facing insurmountable challenges while attempting to develop new programs or processes, or to eliminate old ones. This hurdle for college union practitioners and other university leaders will likely never cease to exist. However, the outcomes of this study provide a framework from which campus leaders can learn to better navigate this dynamic conservatism, which includes the inevitable political and social realities on their campuses.

The outcomes of this study provide five key elements of college unions that are evident in campus community. As they move forward with potential renovation or construction projects, or even day-to-day operations, college union leaders should be well attuned to this important information if they are to succeed in being community builders on their campuses. Equally important, this information should be shared with academic

leaders, major donors, legislators, and members of their university community. Important decisions, principally those regarding the college union, must be made with the key elements of community in mind. College union leaders must not only provide for, but also demand that, students and student needs remain central to the form and function of their facilities. Students and other users of the college union must have a voice at the table, must be included in policy-making decisions, and must be welcomed into processes that allow them to influence the shaping of the facilities themselves. Providing open pathways of communication for students and other users has been identified in this study as an essential component of effective community. College union leaders must understand this importance, and insist that it become or remain a critical piece of the daily operation of their facilities and programs.

*Association of College Unions International (ACUI)*

When taken together, the elements presented here offer a well-considered plan for college union leaders, designers, and university administrators to employ when moving forward with college union renovation or construction projects. Leaders with ACUI will be wise to provide the necessary conduit of information to its membership base, being mindful to include students and university leaders as well as college union and design professionals. The current work of the ACUI Research Program Team has helped move this conversation forward and should continue to be supported. Studies cited previously in this paper provide a number of themes, trends, and attributes of “successful” college unions (Hatton, Farley, and Costas, 2013; Turner and Fifer, 2003; Rullman and van den Kieboom, 2012). Additional literature offers yet more trends and components that

provide a base for informing the college union profession. Strange and Banning (2001) offer four key components of all human environments: 1) Physical condition, design, and layout; 2) Characteristics of the people who inhabit them; 3) Organizational structures related to their purposes; and 4) Inhabitants' collective perceptions or constructions of the context and culture of the setting. Hatton et al. (2009) describe several trends in regard to future planning for college unions: changing demographics, increased diversity, need for flexible space, need for small collaborative spaces, enhanced use of technology, and sustainable design.

A facility-benchmarking database was developed by the education consultant firm Brailsford & Dunlavey and WTW Architects to help college unions who were embarking on a renovation or construction project (Turner et al., 2005). The database contains a list of 13 common components from 40 college unions throughout the United States including: food service, bookstore facilities, ballroom facilities, student organizations, administrative offices, conference/meeting rooms, lounges, additional retail services, recreation and entertainment, and multicultural centers. The findings presented in this study build upon the previous literature and offer additional insight into the elements/components/attributes that need to be included in facilities that truly create community.

The ACUI Facility Design Awards process can also be informed by this study. Several selection criteria (including the involvement of students, partnerships with campus departments, and effective use of space that supports community) are supported by the outcomes of this research and should remain as the key components for selection. However, many aspects that are evident in campus community in this study are absent from the selection criteria. In the future, as the process is better refined for identifying

true community-building facilities, ACUI should consider adding criteria such as: flexibility of spaces, opportunities for spontaneous interaction, spaces for diverse students and ideas, human-scale environments, and bright/open entrances and corridors.

As college union professionals we must continue to keep lines of communication open in our profession, share our ideas and concerns, and build upon past experiences to better inform future practice. For too long the college union profession has kept quiet when it comes to effectively telling the story of community building, especially in the formal scholarship arena (DeSawal and Yakaboski, 2013). The outcomes from this study provide another layer in the foundation of great community building spaces, which provides ACUI and its members a new framework for continued support of scholarship. ACUI, the recognized leader in community-building throughout higher education, is poised to provide the support needed to further research in this area, and to continue to tell the story of the college union and community.

### **Study Limitations**

The research presented here relies on the study of three college union cases, each with its own unique history, circumstances, setting, student community, etc. While careful consideration was used to select three cases analogous to one another so that the findings might be replicated at other similar college unions, it is unreasonable to fully generalize the findings to all college unions. Additionally, it was not possible to pursue every aspect of community in minute detail given the scope of this study. An exhaustive uncovering of all data pertaining to community in college unions, and how students make meaning of that community, was therefore neither feasible nor justifiable. Additionally,

the sampling for the case selection was based on criteria from an external source, the ACUI Facility Design Awards. While the award process has clear criteria for selection and is juried by professionals with college union expertise, it is not a perfect practice. While likely minor, the possibility exists for favoritism, inconsistencies, and/or errors during the selection process.

Another potential limitation to this study is that of researcher bias. As a professional in the field for 20 years, I have a strong personal interest in college unions, the building of community, and higher education in general. Herr & Anderson (2005) warn if a researcher is studying a subject that is their “baby” the opportunity to self-promote may overshadow the true outcomes of the study, or result in “unintended collusion” (p. 36) on behalf of the researcher and the participants. While steps were taken along the way to safeguard against any unintended collusion or potential tainting of data, my outsider-within status as a researcher brings its own potential bias to the study. Going into this research project, I knew that my own stature within the college union field had the potential to affect the participants’ responses (Herr and Anderson, 2005). To assuage the potential for researcher bias, three college union cases were selected that I had never previously visited, and where I had no prior significant relationship with the participants. Every effort was made to mitigate this researcher bias, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Some components of either the research process or the data itself are considered as potential anomalies to the study. Using current Carnegie Classifications, one of the campuses in the study enrolls 500 students fewer than the minimum for the *large* classification. However, across the three campuses in the study, the enrollments are very

comparable to one another, and would generally be considered as mid-size institutions based on overall student populations. Another potential anomaly exists in the composition of the focus groups – one of the full-time staff participants holds an academic appointment rather than a traditional professional staff appointment. In reviewing responses from this participant I determined it was not necessary to code this data separate from the data coded among the staff responses.

Likely due in part to their locations in the upper Midwest, the college unions in this study reside on campuses with predominantly white student populations (Alliance – 87%; Concord – 78%; Hearthstone – 89%). Given the demographic student base, as well as the reliance on facility directors to identify participants for the focus groups, a fully representative participant group was not achieved. The data collected in this study, especially those from the interview and focus groups, is lacking a perspective from students of color. Previous research indicates that students of color perceive their environments (community) differently than white students (Rankin and Reason, 2005; Seider, et al., 2013; Bleikamp, et al., 2015). Because participants in this study were nearly 100 percent white, it is unknown how responses from students of color may have changed the data and therefore the findings of this study.

### **Future Research**

Public spaces on our campuses provide a forum in which students, faculty, staff, and guests can practice societal values and practice living in a diverse community. This study relied on previous scholarship and research to provide the conceptual framework, which was then designed into a three-subject case study. Careful consideration went into

the design in order to create greater external validity and provide for the practical application of outcomes to other settings. The results of my study suggest avenues for additional inquiry.

All three unions house their campus bookstores within their buildings. While the PMU and CSSC stores are outsourced (contracted) to private companies, the SBSU bookstore is maintained as a self-operated auxiliary of the university. As an observer in the field, this distinction did not go unnoticed by me. The look and feel of the SBSU store was much less institutional than the others – instead, it looked and felt like a natural part of the building and the Hearthstone campus. In a similar respect, the food outlets offered in the PMU are the only self-operated dining services functions among the three cases – and again as an observer it is clear that there is more of a “home-team” feel to their overall operation. An opportunity exists to further explore how the nuanced aspects of self-operated versus outsourced auxiliary services might play a role in community.

When observing the physical setting, Merriam (2009) posits several questions: “What is the physical environment like? What is the context? What kinds of behavior is the setting designed for? How is space allocated? Who is in the scene? What brings these people together?” (p. 120). Additional studies that help answer the questions posed by Merriam will further the knowledge base. Information and scholarship regarding the college union profession is becoming more prevalent, although not widely and certainly not universally known. A future study that brings together the findings from previous research and available literature has the potential to be a game-changer for the college union profession. With several doctoral dissertations focusing on the college union currently in process, the knowledge base is growing steadily. The findings here, coupled

with recent and imminent findings, will make for a robust body of literature that will inform college union practitioners as well as higher education leaders and scholars. A potential meta-analysis could identify additional areas of inquiry or might consider further refining the elements discovered in this study, along with the components and themes from additional literature. However, without a concerted effort to tell the college union story, this information may continue to be masked by obscurity.

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## APPENDIX A

### ROLE OF THE COLLEGE UNION

#### **Association of College Unions International Role of the College Union**

The union is the community center of the college, serving students, faculty, staff, alumni, and guests. By whatever form or name, a college union is an organization offering a variety of programs, activities, services, and facilities that, when taken together, represent a well-considered plan for the community life of the college.

The union is an integral part of the educational mission of the college.

- As the center of the college community life, the union complements the academic experience through an extensive variety of cultural, educational, social, and recreational programs. These programs provide the opportunity to balance course work and free time as cooperative factors in education.
- The union is a student-centered organization that values participatory decision-making. Through volunteerism, its boards, committees, and student employment, the union offers first-hand experience in citizenship and educates students in leadership, social responsibility, and values.
- In all its processes, the union encourages self-directed activity, giving maximum opportunity for self-realization and for growth in individual social competency and group effectiveness.

The union's goal is the development of persons as well as intellects.

Traditionally considered the "hearthstone" or "living room" of the campus, today's union is the gathering place of the college. The union provides services and conveniences that members of the college community need in their daily lives and creates an environment for getting to know and understand others through formal and informal associations.

The union serves as a unifying force that honors each individual and values diversity. The union fosters a sense of community that cultivates enduring loyalty to the college.

*Adopted by the Association's general membership in 1996, this statement is based on the Role of the College Union statement, 1956.*

## APPENDIX B

### ACUI FACILITY DESIGN AWARD PROCESS (2014)

#### Statement of Purpose

To encourage excellence in the design of student-centered facilities that support campus community building and student learning.

#### Eligibility

All entries must be college union or campus life facility projects built anywhere in the world; must have been completed, occupied, and in service prior to entry in this program; and must have been completed since Dec. 1, 2008. All entries must be submitted with the consent of the owner. Previous projects winning an ACUI Facility Design Award of Excellence are not eligible.

#### Categories

Awards may be given for four budget categories of new college union buildings, additions, renovations, restorations, outdoor environments, interior dining environments, interior or outdoor recreation environments, and interior redesign and refurbishing. The total cost of the building or individual environment is the determining factor.

- Less than \$15 million
- \$15 million–\$25 million
- \$25 million–\$45 million
- More than \$45 million

#### Entry Form

Provide a full description of the project (up to 1,000 words) and a 100-word summary. The following questions are offered to help provide a framework for your response:

- How did the planning and design process involve students and the campus community?
- Did the planning process include partnerships with other campus departments or external agencies, and, if so, how did those partnerships affect the design?
- What aspects of the campus community's goals and program shaped the project, and how does the design reflect those goals?
- Describe different and effective uses of space that support building community and student learning.
- How do the architecture and/or design incorporate technology to support the project goals?
- How did the architecture and/or design fit into the existing context of the campus architecture and master plan?
- What creative use was made of materials and building systems?
- How did the design minimize short-term and/or long-term maintenance?
- Describe other sustainable design materials, methods, or practices implemented in the project.
- If the project used existing building infrastructure, what imaginative design features evolved?

## APPENDIX C

### FACILITY MANAGER RECRUITMENT EMAIL

[Subject Line of email: “College Unions that Build Campus Community”]

Dear *Facility Manager*:

My name is Corbin Smyth, I am a doctoral student in the College of Education and Human Development on the Twin Cities campus of the University of Minnesota. I also serve the University of Minnesota Duluth as Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Life where I have management responsibility for the student center, campus parking and transportation, dining operations, sustainability, and trademark licensing. I have over 17 years experience serving college unions on four distinct campuses.

I am conducting dissertation research regarding college union facilities, to identify elements that contribute to the development of community on campus. I have identified *College Union Facility* as a facility that has been noted for its contributions to campus community development as a recipient of the ACUI Facility Design Award. Your facility is one that has been identified, and I am reaching out to facility managers/directors to conduct a one hour on-site structured interview. While on site I also plan to tour your facility, conduct a focus group study with facility users, and review construction/design documents if appropriate. Your assistance with these additional elements will be greatly appreciated.

I am hopeful you will agree to help with this research project, which will add to the body of knowledge around campus community building, and that will benefit both the college union and the design fields. All participants, as well as their facilities and campuses, will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity in this study.

If you agree to participate, please reply directly to me so that we can begin to make arrangements for a time for me to visit your facility some time during August to October this year.

Thank you in advance for your interest in this research project.

Best regards,

Corbin J. Smyth  
Doctoral Student, University of Minnesota  
Associate Vice Chancellor, University of Minnesota Duluth

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW & FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

[Sample Cognitive Questions regarding consent]

- 1) Why do you think this research is being conducted?
- 2) Why do you suppose that you have been chosen to participate?

#### Interview Opening Statement

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this important study regarding community and physical spaces. I have provided two copies of the Consent Form regarding your rights as a research participant. Please review it carefully and let me know if you have any specific questions. We will sign both copies and each of us will retain one copy for our own records.

The purpose of this interview is to ascertain your understanding of community on your campus, and how your facility's physical spaces play a role in fostering that community. Do you have any concerns about the interview itself, or how the information you offer might be used as part of the research study? [Answer as needed] As we talked about before, this interview will be videotaped to make sure that I don't misunderstand any of the important information you have to share regarding this topic. As soon as you are comfortable, we'll get started.

#### Interview Questions

1. What is it that you love about working in *College Union Facility*? (rapport question)
2. How is physical space important to creating campus community?
3. What aspects of your facility do you think are particularly helpful in creating campus community at *This University*?
4. What is it about the physical spaces in *College Union Facility* that are important to creating campus community?
5. In what ways was the campus community involved during the pre-design, design, and construction phases of your facility project? How were you directly involved?
6. How have you or has the campus measured the effectiveness of your new facility in creating or building upon campus community?

7. Please talk about the challenges you face in effectively managing the spaces in *College Union Facility*.
8. What important lessons have you learned since your facility has opened? In other words, knowing what you know now – would you have designed something differently?
9. What is your perception of what creates campus community?
10. If you have had the opportunity to visit other college union facilities, what can you share about their physical spaces that helps create community on their campus? (first closing question)
11. So, what I have heard you say about your facility is Point 1, Point 2, and Point 3. Have I heard you correctly, and are there any final observations that you have regarding *College Union Facility* that you want to be sure I include in this study? (final closing question to validate the key points)

#### Probable Follow-up Questions

- Can you please give a specific example(s)?
- How do you suppose others on campus would answer that question?
- Do you suppose there are other possibilities as well?
- Is that how you see students and other campus community members experiencing *College Union Facility*?
- Why do you suppose that was a challenge?
- Is that a clear definition in your mind?

## APPENDIX E

### INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY – PG. 1/2

#### UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

#### **Topic: Elements of college unions evident in campus community.**

#### Background and Purpose of Study

You are asked to take part in a research study involving three college union facilities. You will be asked questions regarding your interpretation of community on your college campus, and how the physical spaces in your facility lend themselves to building community. Your responses, aggregated with responses from additional respondents, will be used to identify common elements in facility design and program development that are necessary for creating an effective campus community.

*A researcher from the University of Minnesota Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development is conducting this study.*

#### Procedure

Your involvement with this research interview and/or focus group is *completely voluntary*, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked a series of questions that will last approximately 60 minutes in total. The interview and/or focus group will be conducted on site at your facility, at a time and date convenient to you some time in October to December, 2015. The interview and/or focus group will be recorded on video, and a written transcription of the interview will be created following the interview. Video recordings will be used solely for the purpose of properly capturing participants' statements in the written transcription.

#### Risks and Benefits of Participation in this Study

There are virtually no risks to participating in this study, nor are there any immediate benefits. You will not be compensated if you agree to participate. Your choice to participate or to not participate in this study will not affect your relationship with the University of Minnesota, nor with your institution of employment/enrollment.

#### Confidentiality

All video recordings and transcripts will be maintained in a secure, confidential file accessible only to the researcher. Recordings will be destroyed following the analysis, and no personally identifiable information will be used in the transcripts – you will be identified using a code only. Participants will never be personally identified, and campus names and facilities will be given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

## **INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY – PG. 2/2**

### UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Topic: Elements of college unions evident in campus community.

#### Contact Information

The researcher in this study is: Corbin J. Smyth, Ed.D. candidate – Department of OLPD, College of Education and Human Development. You may contact this researcher following the interview at any time by email: [csmyth@umn.edu](mailto:csmyth@umn.edu).

If you have any concerns that you feel you cannot discuss with the researcher, you may contact Dr. David Weerts, Doctoral Advisor, Department of OLPD, University of Minnesota, 612-625-2289 or [dweerts@umn.edu](mailto:dweerts@umn.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the advisor, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line: 612-625-1650, or by mail: D-528 Mayo MMC 820, 420 Delaware St. SE, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455.

Final Version: October 5, 2015

IRB Study Number: 1507E75381

## APPENDIX F: Patterns

	PMU Total	CSSC Total	SBSU Total	Grand Total
Space	58	65	26	149
Students	42	39	35	116
Place	24	44	21	89
Involvement	28	20	9	57
Openness	12	26	19	57
Gather	25	20	10	55
Flexibility	17	13	9	39
Path	26	7	5	38
Hangout	12	12	10	34
Lounge	11	17	6	34
Welcome	12	17	5	34
Program	10	17	6	33
Change	11	14	8	33
Natural light	14	7	11	32
Environment	24	3	3	30
Intentional design	6	20	2	28
Services	15	6	7	28
Open staircases	6	11	10	27
Main Street	9	7	11	27
Connect	13	6	7	26
Leadership	11	6	9	26
Student-centered	11	5	9	25
Food	8	8	8	24
Crossroads	7	6	10	23
Visual connection	7	7	8	22
Conversation	3	2	16	21
Info Desk	8	4	9	21
Lighting	8	12	1	21
Cleanliness	9	3	8	20
Culture	2	14	4	20
Assess	4	12	3	19
Inclusive	4	11	4	19
Multicultural	8	9	2	19
Home	3	8	8	19
Support	9	1	8	18
Coffee	5	8	4	17

## APPENDIX F: Patterns

	PMU Total	CSSC Total	SBSU Total	Grand Total
Diversity	5	8	4	17
Clear signage	5	7	4	16
Images of students	3	9	4	16
Tradition	5	7	4	16
Variety	6	5	4	15
Active	3	4	7	14
Transform	3	6	5	14
Evolve	0	6	7	13
Social	3	6	4	13
Technology	6	3	4	13
Warmth	6	6	1	13
Activity	6	3	3	12
Loyalty	1	6	5	12
Transparency	3	5	4	12
Fireplaces	3	1	7	11
Meeting rooms	4	5	2	11
Dialogue	0	5	6	11
Future	4	5	1	10
Listen	2	5	3	10
Maintenance	3	4	3	10
Stakeholder	3	0	7	10
Wifi	4	3	3	10
Feedback	0	3	6	9
Nooks	5	1	3	9
Bookstore	1	2	5	8
Linger	2	4	2	8
Energy	1	5	1	7
Teach	2	1	4	7
Computer stations	1	3	2	6
Storytelling	4	2	0	6
Access	1	1	3	5
Living Room	3	0	2	5
Success	2	2	0	4
Sustainability	3	0	1	4
Networking	3	0	0	3