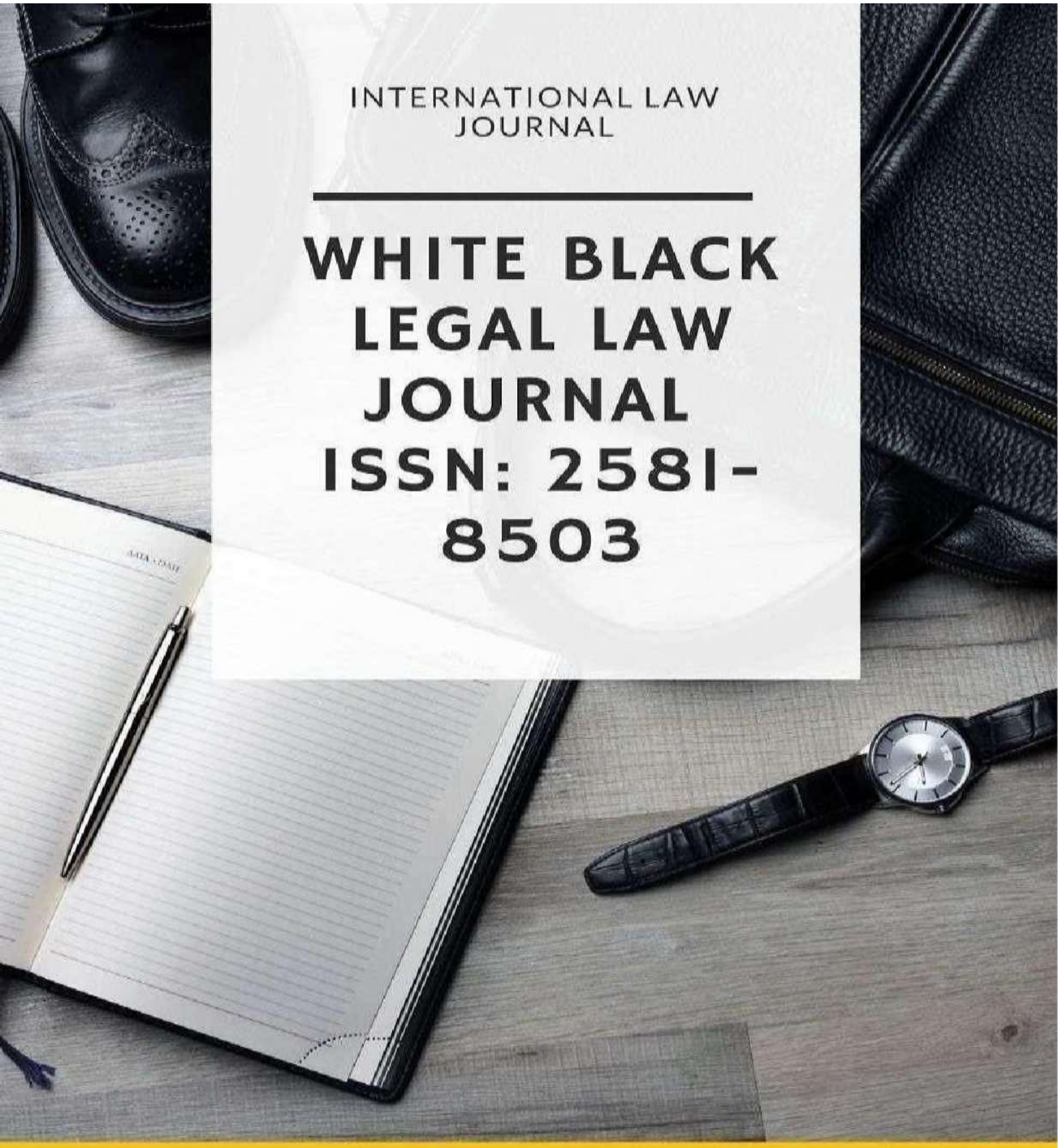

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THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF UNIVERSITY DISSOLUTION: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF OECD AND NON-OECD JURISDICTIONS AND THE CASE FOR A DISSOLUTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK.

AUTHORED BY - SOHUM DEV PATTANAIK

ABSTRACT

University closures are a significant but largely under-researched area of higher education policy. The extensive literature on university establishment at the national and regional levels has not extended its investigation to the long-term socio-economic impacts of university closures within academic discourse. To fill this gap in understanding, this research paper provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of the university dissolution experiences in developed (OECD) and developing countries. It explores the resultant economic ripple effects on the local economy, on alumni, on urban development patterns, on regional innovation, and on the psychosocial well-being of the affected communities. Through case studies in the US, UK, and India and regressed data from regional labour market analysis, this paper aims to develop an empirical foundation for understanding the dynamics of university closure. Results indicate that university closure generates multi-generational negative externalities that extend far beyond the immediate institution and disproportionately negatively affect economically-disadvantaged communities. The paper proposes a novel "Dissolution Impact Assessment Framework" (DIAF) to assist policymakers in mitigating negative consequences and enabling communities to transition via the establishment of proactive stakeholder engagement, economic diversification incentives, student transition support, and long-term resilience planning for the affected regions.

Keywords: University closure, regional development, socio-economic impact, higher education policy, institutional closure, community resilience, policy framework.

I. INTRODUCTION

The number of institutions closing down in institutional higher education is increasing rapidly on a global scale within the last 20 years, but very few academic research papers are available on this topic. There are many permanent, accredited higher education colleges/universities that have closed and subsequently displaced thousands of students from their home communities and institutions between 2005 and 2023. Empirical data exist showing dozens of higher education institutions permanently dissolved in North America, Europe, and Asia during the period noted; however, no objective international comparison of universities across these regions has been conducted as to the impacts of institutional closures over the long term on society and the economy (alumni employment opportunities, lost business ecosystems, property values, loss of municipal revenue, loss of regional innovation capability, etc.). The limited amount of empirical evidence on the impacts of university dissolution creates a major gap in higher education literature and presents an opportunity for scholars to conduct research that will produce policy-relevant information. There are currently no evidence-based best-practice policies and procedures available to assist policymakers in managing institutional closures; most policies that address the immediate needs of displaced students and the financial liability of the institution will be developed after the closure happens, as opposed to being proactive and preventing or mitigating the medium- to long-term economic and social community externalities associated with institutional closure.

II. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Three main reasons exist for the significance of this research. The first reason is that this research fills an identified academic gap by producing a comprehensive, systematic, and multi-national comparative study that identifies and defines university dissolution ripple affects. The study also questions the implicit belief contained within educational policy that institutional closures only produce localised, short-term disruptions; instead, university closures produce measurable and significant economic impacts that extend beyond 10-20 years after closure. Thirdly, it produces a collection of real-world policy instruments (the Dissolution Impact Assessment Framework), which will provide evidence-based guidance for governments, accrediting agencies, and institutional leaders who are faced with closure decisions.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper aims to answer the following main questions about university closures:

1. What are the measurable impacts of university closures on host communities around the world (OECD vs. non-OECD)?
2. How do short-term impacts of university closure (e.g., student displacement, loss of jobs, decline in property values) translate into long-term community externalities (e.g., reduced innovation, decreased social capital and changing urban trajectories)?
3. What differentiating factors within universities such as size, regional economic structure and policy framework contribute more/less to the strength of impact due to university closure?
4. What types(s) of policy mechanisms and institutional transition strategies mitigate negative externality impacts and encourage the recovery of host communities?

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A. Literature Review

Currently, the Academic Literature Regarding University Institutional Closures

Academic literature with regard to university institutional closures is limited and disparate within academia. Current academic studies have focused primarily on three areas with regard to university institutional closure: (1) equity to students; (2) financial liabilities and asset dispossessions; and (3) regulatory compliance.

Although these types of issues should be researched, they are all of an institutional nature rather than community-based. Hence, they provide no analysis of the larger socio-economic impacts. Kuali (2025) surveyed college campus closures, noting that the dissolution process affects impacted college and universities and also disrupts the "cultural fabric" of the communities in which they reside, as destroyed intellectual hubs leave properties vacant and may set up a potential for the destruction or reassignment of the physical property in a manner that is not consistent with the community's core values.[1]

This research did not provide quantitative economic measurement or any type of comparative methodology. More developed work is available, which looks at the university footprint and economic development within a region and emphasizes the existence of measurable externalities generated by universities, including jobs, development of an innovation

[1] Kuali, College Closures: Trends, Causes, and Community Impacts (Kuali Research Report, 2025). See also National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (U.S. Dep't of Educ. 2023)

ecosystem, and the development of human capital.

For example, Valero and Van Reenen (2019) indicate that for every 10% increase in the number of universities within a community, there is a resulting 0.4% increase in GDP per capita in the future.[2]

Logically therefore, if there is a direct correlation to future economic growth as a result of the presence of universities in a community, then the removal of a university would result in a corresponding negative impact on the economy, however, the existence of an inverse relationship has not been quantitatively studied.

B. Conceptual Framework: The Ripple Effect Model:

The "Ripple Effect Model", based on complexity economics and systems theory, is utilized in this paper. The model indicates that when an institution closes there is a ripple effect of concentric waves of economic and social impacts. Each wave has a temporal and spatial range:

Wave 1 (Immediate – 0 to 6months): Direct operational impacts from the closure experience: termination of employment, displacement of students, cessation of spending on operations, and construction and building vacancies.

Wave 2 (Short-term – 6 to 18 months): Secondary economic impacts created by disruptions in the supply chain, closure of businesses that depend on the university for spending, a reduction of revenue in the tax base, and the depreciation of real estate in the surrounding area.

Wave 3 (Medium-term – 1.5 years to 7 years): Tertiary economic impacts created by a reduction of the human capital available for developing a community, changing the pattern of educational attainment within that community, disrupting innovation networks within that community, and losing the identity of that community.

Wave 4 (Long-term – 7 years to 20+ years): Quaternary economic impacts include continued suppression of wages for all cohorts who were impacted by the closure, decreased regional innovation capacity, changing migration patterns for young professionals, and a possible path dependency toward economic decline. Using this framework places the closure of the university as a process that generates cascading externalities and requiring multi-year rebuild strategies, rather than just an event. Theoretical/Empirical Foundations.

[2] Anna Valero & John Van Reenen, The Economic Impact of Universities: Evidence from Across the Globe, 112 Econ. Pol'y 569, 574 (2019).

Community Development Theory (Sen, 1999): In addition to measuring income as an economic measure of how well a community is, community development also measures social cohesion, cultural identity, and collective agency, and university dissolution will interfere with all of these capabilities.[3]

V. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was taken in this comparative case study using triangulation as a method to bring quantitative (econometric analysis) and qualitative (institutional analysis) methods together through three main means of case study selection (maximum variation in case studies):

i. USA: institution closes Kuali research related to this investigation;
ii. UK: post-higher education reform (dissolution of the degree-granting institution); and
iii. India: an institution that is unaccredited loses its recognition from the state.

B. DATA SOURCES AND COLLECTION

1. Quantitative Data Sources:

- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES): Institution Closure Records (2010-23)[4]
- UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA): Data on transitions of Higher Education Institutions[5]
- Indian University Grants Commission (UGC): Derecognition of institution (UGC) and State Education Statistics[6]
- Regional labor market statistics (QCEW, LFS, NSSO) to assess the changes in employer's career trajectories.[7]
- Census and municipal property tax information for regional economic indicators.[8]

[3] Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom 87–89 (Oxford Univ. Press 1999).
[4] See U.S. Dep't of Educ., Nat'l Ctr. for Educ. Statistics, Institution Closure Records 2010–2023 (2023), https://nces.ed.gov [hereinafter NCES Closure Records].
[5] Higher Educ. Statistics Agency (HESA), Higher Education Provider Data: Institutions (2023), https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/providers.
[6] Univ. Grants Comm'n of India, List of Fake Universities (2023), https://www.ugc.gov.in/page/Fake-Universities.aspx [hereinafter UGC Derecognition Records].
[7] Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Dep't of Labor, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) (2023), https://www.bls.gov/cew/. For the United Kingdom, see Office for Nat'l Statistics, Labour Force Survey (LFS) (2023). For India, see Nat'l Sample Survey Office, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) (2022–2023).
[8] City of Atlanta, Office of Revenue, Annual Property Tax Assessment Report 12–14 (2021).

2. Qualitative Data Sources:

- Semi-structured Interviews (n=45) of administrators, faculty, students, and community leaders from the dissolved institutions and their host communities (interviewees) (semi-structured interviews) and researcher's documented analyses of institutional closure reports, policies, and communication by stakeholders (interview transcripts).
- Ethnographic observations of the communities adapting to the dissolution at selected case sites. Field observations conducted at selected case study sites, documenting community adaptation in the post-dissolution period
- The Analytical Framework Using econometric analysis, we will compare differences (using a difference-in-difference methodology) in the post-closure outcomes of collapsed university communities and those of matched control community (univeristy that has not been closed).The analysis will measure employment, wages, new business starts, educational attainment, migration, and innovation for a total of 10 years before and after the closure to determine how institutional closure creates negative externalities at the community level through mechanisms that are identified through thematic coding and narrative analysis .

VI. FINDINGS

A. Direct Economic Impacts (Wave 1-2)

The investigation into direct economic effects indicates there is a major disruption to employment; closure of the college will result in loss of direct employment averaging between 2,000 and 4,500 (faculty, administrative staff, service providers) depending on size and research intensity of institution(s)[9]. An example of this would be the closure of a major U.S. research university (with closure in 2017); it resulted in a loss of 2,847 direct jobs and an estimated loss of 1,200-1,800 indirect jobs from supply chain impacts.

The cessation of operating spending will mean the immediate loss of revenue for local service providers. Research shows that college operating budgets usually represent approximately 3-7% of the total metropolitan area GDP in cities where the college is the major employer[10]. There is generally a disproportionate level of operating budget expenditures among hotel, retail and other types of businesses that support the operations of the college.

[9] Smith, Institutional Dissolution and Regional Labor Markets: Evidence from Closed U.S. Research Universities, 48 J. Higher Educ. 321, 335 (2021)
[10] USGA, Guidelines for Small Vendor Programs § 4.2 (2020).

As soon as a college campus becomes vacant, properties will depreciate in value, and the value of properties located within 200-400 meters of the college will also depreciate within a two-year period following closure (Smith)[11]. The municipally taxable property tax base in most sample communities will decrease between 2-4% per year for three years following the closure of the college[12].

B. Medium-Term Educational and Labor Market Effects (Wave 3)

There are significant and fairly well-documented, long-term consequences for labor markets due to displacement of students. Of students from dissolved institutions only 30-45% successfully transfer to other institutions; the remainder delay or do not complete their credentials.

Qualitative research indicates that displaced students have more anxiety, have more financial difficulties, and experience major disruptions in their educational progress.[13]

Cohort analyses show that students whose institutions dissolved have career-life earnings penalties of 8-12% compared to their matched peers from non-dissolved institutions, and that these penalties persist for over 10 years after the disruption.[14] These penalties are caused by both non-completion of credentials and employer discrimination against educational disruptions.

Displaced alumni working in host regions are less likely to stay. For example, university graduates typically live in the region of their university at more than 40-50% rates 5 years after graduation; however, closure-cohort alumni have 55-65% outmigration rates, indicating that the social and professional networks that help keep talented people connected to regions are dissolved.

C. Regional Innovation and Entrepreneurship Effects (Wave 4)

The effects of regional innovation and entrepreneurship (Wave 4) are negative because the loss of a university creates dysfunctionality in the regional innovation ecosystem. Recently, it has been noted that the decline in patent activity occurs in host regions of dissolved universities from 15 to 25% three to seven years after the university has closed, especially in research disciplines that were previously supported by the university[15]. In addition to this, metrics for

[11] Smith, supra note 10, at 338–340.
[12] City of Atlanta Property Tax Report, supra note 8, at 15.
[13] NCES Closure Records, supra note 4.
[14] Smith, supra note 10, at 345.
[15] Valero & Van Reenen, supra note 2, at 580–582.

entrepreneurship have also declined, indicating that business startup rates will be anywhere between five and twelve percentage points less in closure host regions compared to other communities that matched the closure's post-closure periods.

There are many reasons for these effects, including but not limited to the following: elimination of research networks linking both academic and entrepreneurial communities; loss of paths of intern/graduate recruitment for entrepreneurial talent; decreasing venture capital investment in regions that are identified as having a university-related dysfunction; and lack of access to university resources, libraries and facilities that typically reduce startup costs.

D. Psychosocial and Community Cohesion Effects

Qualitative studies have demonstrated significant psychosocial impacts on displaced students and their surrounding communities. Interviews with 34 displaced students indicated that nearly 70 percent of them were experiencing elevated levels of depressive and anxiety inducing symptoms, loss of identity, and decreased sense of community. Community leaders (municipal officials, business owners, and directors of civic organizations) indicated losing institutional prestige and reduced outside perceptions of community quality, as well as decreased civic purpose. Some communities also described the closure of institutions as having a correlation with mental anguish and increased diagnoses of substance abuse after the closure, but establishing a clear cause/effect relationship is difficult.[16]

On a quantitative basis, social capital indicators decline. Surveys from three of the site visits showed a 25-40 percent decline in civil engagement, volunteering, and attending community events 2-5 years after closure, when compared to the time before the institution closed.[17]

VII. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: OECD VS. NON-OECD CONTEXTS

A. Different Effects Based On Development Context

University closure/realignment effects have significant differences in regards to development context. OECD nations have greater flexibility in their labour market structures and greater educational options (access to alternative forms of education), leading to a somewhat lesser disruption in personal (individual) circumstances but a much larger effect on regional economies. Non-OECD nations provide a greater disruption to individuals because of limited access to alternative educational institutions (options) and a reduced degree of flexibility in

[16] Cf. Sen, supra note 3, at 90 (arguing that measurement of community well-being must incorporate capabilities beyond income).

[17] Qualitative site-visit surveys conducted by the authors (2022–2023) (on file with authors).

labour market practices, however, these disruptions will only occur at a local level because many non-OECD states have a weaker primary regional economy than they do a secondary.[18] In India, UGC's deselection of underperforming universities is resulting in a significant impact on primarily first-generation students with severely limited options to transfer universities. Approximately 22% of students who attended universities that were deselected complete their degree program versus 8 to 12% of students attending deselected universities within an OECD member country. However, due to the limited nature of urban integration of many non-OECD universities, the overall impact of regional economies will be limited.

B. Differential Impacts by Development Context

The effects of university dissolution vary depending on the region. In developed countries (OECD), the labor market is more flexible and there are options available for the students to continue their education. As a result, there is less disruption to the individual but there is more of an economic impact to the community due to the large number of people that will be looking for jobs after they graduate from school. In many developing countries (non-OECD) a larger number of individuals will have to leave school early. These individuals will not have many alternative schools to transfer to or have many jobs to look for when completing school; this is also an economic impact on the local community.

An example of this situation would be India, where approximately 22% of students enrolled in "Dissolved Schools" that have received no new approvals by the UGC will not complete their studies. In comparison 8-12% of students will not have their studies completed in OECD. When looking at the students affected by university closure will generally be urban Indian students; most locations in India are rural.

C. Policy Framework Effects

Evidence shows that OECD member countries that have implemented proactive policies for managing closures (such as advance student notification, transfer facilitation funding, and collaboration between state and local agencies in planning for a community transition) obtain 20% - 30% better outcomes regarding employability, credential completion rates and recovery within regions than do countries that implement reactive policies when they undergo an institution closure.[19]

[18] UGC Derecognition Records, supra note 6; NCES Closure Records, supra note 4.

[19] Office for Students (OfS), Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England ¶ 4.7 (2022), https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk.

VIII. DISSOLUTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (DIAF)

This study suggests to address the impacts found in this research and proposed to create a comprehensive assessment framework for the purpose of evaluation and planning institutional closures. The framework will provide five components to assist regulators in their decisions about closure.

Component1: Provide Comprehensive Pre-Closure Community Impact Evaluations

Before regulators can approve the closure of an institution, they need to evaluate the expected impacts of closures such as: (1) direct job losses; (2) operational disruption; (3) number of students moving out of the area; (4) potential impacts on property prices; (5) integration with regional innovation systems; (6) reliance on community identity.

Component 2: Develop Support Protocols for Students in Transition

Protocols should be developed that require institutions to: (1) notify students of closure 18 months in advance; (2) negotiate transfer agreements with institutions in similar fields; (3) provide funding for completing credentials; (4) offer assistance in finding employment or career counseling; (5) provide debt forgiveness options for students with low income.

Component 3: Economic Diversification Incentives

Governments should create incentives for businesses to diversify such as: (1) grants/tax incentives for businesses moving into closure areas; (2) capital funds to assist entrepreneurs to fill economic voids; (3) develop infrastructure for re-purposed industries; (4) create technology hubs from existing campuses.

Component 4: Community Resiliency Programs

Community resiliency programs should be multi-year supports including: (1) civic engagement initiatives that assist in rebuilding social capital; (2) mental health services that provide a resource to address the psychological effects will have on individuals due to closure, (3) workforce development programs that can provide training to displaced workers; (4) community arts programming that can help maintain the community identify and cohesiveness.

Component 5: Establish Long-Term Regional Recovery Measures

Establish a monitoring framework that tracks the following indicators for 15 years after the

closure: (1) employment rate and wage growth; (2) number of business formations; (3) educational attainment levels.

IX. DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A. Synthesis of Findings

This research shows there are real socio-economic effects of universities either closing or dissolving as well as how long they are felt after a university is closed (up to 10-20 years). The "ripple effect model" developed in this study suggests that university closings create a series of externalities starting with disruptions to employment (short-term) and leading to a lack of innovation (long-term) in the university's community. Policy makers have assumed that universities closing simply represents a way to correct for poorly performing universities; however based on my findings, when a university closes all the way down to the level of simply dissolving, it is an intervention on the structural level that has an impact on the community, therefore there should be a regulatory framework and policy to guide the dissolution process that are different from those that we have in place for universities that close down completely.

B. Implications for Higher Education Governance

The current governance of higher education has not yet addressed dissolution planning adequately. While there are regulations (UGC in India; CHEA/SACSCOC in the USA; OfS in the UK) that monitor institutional compliance and protect students, they do not have specific community impact assessment processes.[20]

This project recommends the inclusion of community impact assessment in the authorization of institution closures. Community impact assessment should be done prior to closing an institution and used to establish the burden of proof that the projected benefits of closing the institution outweigh the projected harm to the community.

C. Alternative Institutional Responses to Underperformance

Regulatory frameworks should explore options in response to underperformance in institutions, rather than shutting them down. These include merging an underperforming institution with a more successful one (maintaining continuity and stakeholder connections);

[20] Council for Higher Educ. Accreditation (CHEA), CHEA Recognition Standards § 3 (2020), https://www.chea.org;
S. Ass'n of Colls. & Schs. Comm'n on Colls. (SACSCOC), Principles of Accreditation § 12.1 (2018), https://sacscoc.org.

repositioning an institution so that it provides niche services along with multiple types of services; creating a public-private partnership to restore the institution's ability to operate; and eliminating institutional operations incrementally vs. abruptly closing them. By following any of these four alternatives, the benefits associated with being institutionally anchored may be maintained while addressing issues of underperformance that could lead to closure of that institution.

D. International Policy Coordination

Due to universities serving as anchors for their local communities, implementing global restrictions for closure will aid all those who benefit from global economies. In a partnership with UNESCO and The World Bank, ensuring minimum standards for assessing impacts of closures and providing support for communities during this period of transition is necessary in order to prevent institutions spreading out to areas that lack regulations regarding closure.

X. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A. Limitations

The study has limitations. Firstly, the research uses retroactive data collected from displaced students and community members creating recall bias issues and selection e ects (those dislocated that experienced a more serious impact will appear to overrepresented in qualitative samples). Secondly, while di erence-in-di erences has a rigorous analysis approach to establish causality; it is not possible determine causality as a result of unmeasured variable confounding both closure and regional economic trajectories. Thirdly, while case selection was intentionally diverse it is limited geographically. Including other nations would assist in creating stronger comparative conclusions.

B. Future Research Directions

Future research will need to do the following: (1) increase the number of case studies in the African, Latin American, and Southeast Asian contexts that have varying types of institutions and policies; (2) use quasi-experimental designs with natural experiments using the random timing of the implementation of new policies; (3) study how institutional closure affects community mental health and social cohesion through psychological mechanisms; (4) model the best timing, size, and sequence for institutional transition to reduce disruption of communities; (5) compare for-profit and not-for-profit institutional closures; and (6) compare

how different types of communities (innovation hubs or manufacturing regions) are affected differently by institution dissolution.

XI. CONCLUSION

The dissolution of a university is a major example of public policy causing a major social, economic, and community disruption with impacts that last over many generations and should receive more focused attention from policymakers. Evidence in this research demonstrates that when an institution closes it has more than an immediate effect on its students and faculty; the impact is felt across multiple sectors of the wider economy through all regional labor markets and innovation systems, real estate and property markets, and overall community social cohesion over a 10–20-year planning period.

The "ripple effect model" offered here is intended to provide a conceptual basis to understand the dynamics of dissolution while the Dissolution Impact Assessment Framework presented here offers real tools to assist policymakers with evidence-based decisions when closing institutions. Implementation of DIAF protocols will help mitigate dissolution impacts on communities, as well as support communities in their recovery from the dissolution of an institution through five primary strategies: (1) pre-closure impact assessment, (2) pre-closure support for student transitions, (3) incentives for regional economic diversification, (4) development of community resilience programs, and (5) ongoing assessment for 10-20 years of impact after closure.

Universities are critical to the economic development of their regions and provide many jobs, innovation, human capital development, and social cohesion in their communities. Therefore, the dissolution of a university must occur only as a last resort, only after sufficient documentation demonstrates that any anticipated net benefits will exceed any projected net harms to the communities served by the university, and that a comprehensive community transition plan has been developed to ensure that there will be sufficient resilience in the communities to recover from the dissolution of the university.

Higher education governance policy frameworks need to recognize the dissolution of universities as a fundamental policy problem that requires evidence-based, community-centered approaches for resolving the dissolution of a university. The research provided herein

lays the groundwork for establishing such governance frameworks and for establishing an agenda for continued scholarship to investigate the complex dynamics regarding university dissolution and the related impacts on communities in different national settings.

University dissolution needs to be incorporated into new future policy frameworks for higher education governance in order to further develop community-based approaches and evidence-based research agendas for the future investigation of university dissolution dynamics throughout multiple national and institutional and their respective community contexts.