ABSTRACT

LAWRENCE, CHERRELLE. Strengthening HBCU Partnerships: A Narrative Inquiry Study of HBCU Leaders' Collaboration with External Corporate Partners. (Under the direction of Dr. Carrol L. Warren).

This study explores the partnership dynamics between corporations and Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), aiming to enhance relationships to better support HBCUs. The research question investigates the lived experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year HBCUs in North Carolina who have collaborated with external corporate partners to support, develop, and enhance their institutions. This study covers the historical background of HBCUs and their battle with historical disparities. The design of the qualitative study is a narrative inquiry with seven participants, including alumni, those in top leadership roles, and faculty. The data was collected using a semi-structured, in-depth interview approach to capture and form narratives of each of the study's participants. The data was examined through a process involving open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to uncover recurring patterns and themes across all participants.

The findings align with the guiding conceptual framework, Amey, Eddy & Ozaki's Partnership Development Model (2007) and are supported by additional frameworks including, Successful Partnership Characteristics proposed by Grace (2002), and the Shared Leadership Practices, proposed by Brown, Williams & Esters (2021). Key themes include the importance of being student-centered, tailored approaches to partnerships, the role of champions, and the impact of capacity building. Implications for practice include recommendations for corporate engagement training manuals that emphasize understanding HBCU history, values, and needs,

fostering open communication, trust, and collaboration, and contributing to institutional advancement.

This study highlights the crucial role of corporate partnerships in supporting HBCUs and suggests practical strategies for enhancing these relationships. It calls for further research and support in this area to continue advancing the success and sustainability of HBCUs.

Keywords: HBCU, corporate partnerships, strategic partnership, student-centered, Amey, Eddy & Ozaki's Partnership Development Model, successful partnership characteristics, shared leadership practices, North Carolina, capacity building, institutional advancement

Strengthening HBCU Partnerships: A Narrative Inquiry Study of HBCU Leaders' Collaboration with External Corporate Partners

By
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APPROVED BY:

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my dad, **Alonzo Scott Coleman**, who could only dream that his “bae / baby girl” would become a doctor. Rest in Peace “my daddy.”

To My Husband and Best Friend, **Martin Lawrence** - whom I met and fell in love with at North Carolina A&T State University - thank you for your love, support, and sacrifice through this journey. I know that it wasn’t easy as I pursued this degree while you worked tirelessly to grow your dream (Lawrence & Perry BBQ - *the best dang on BBQ in NC*) but look at us… WE DID IT! “I am Michael Jordan!”

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-Dr. Claw

P.S. Shoutout to NCSU’s Hill Library! Without you, none of this would be possible!

BIOGRAPHY

Cherrelle was born in rural North Carolina but grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the country. She relocated to North Carolina nearly 20 years ago to pursue a bachelor's degree in Business Education and Marketing from the top HBCU in the nation, North Carolina A&T State University. She later attended East Carolina University, earning a Master of Business Administration.

Cherrelle is a dedicated professional with expertise in education, training, and diversity recruitment. Her doctoral research at NC State University focused on fostering strategic partnerships, particularly in historically black institutions. Currently serving as Professional Development and Knowledge Management Lead at Clarkston Consulting, she directs training initiatives and spearheads diversity recruitment. With a background in corporate learning and university relations, she is passionate about fostering connections and advancing adult learning. Over the past ten years, she has had experiences in K-12, higher education, and non-profit management. In 2013, her entrepreneurial mindset led her to start a non-profit organization for women, and in 2016, she helped her husband start his food truck business, Lawrence & Perry BBQ.

Cherrelle resides in Franklin County, NC, with her college sweetheart and husband, Martin. Together, they have two amazing pup-kids, Prince Roc & Blaze.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

Since the early 1800s, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have played a pivotal role in the educational success of Black individuals. These institutions originated from the aspirations of former slaves who advocated for widespread and state-supported public education for the Black community (Anderson, 1988). There are over 100 HBCUs in the United States, annually serving nearly 300,000 students (The White House, 2021). These HBCUs enroll 11% of Black college students and contribute to almost 20% of all Black graduates in the U.S. (Gasman, 2013; UNCF, n.d.).

Studies indicate that HBCUs play a crucial role in shaping society. HBCUs have a track record of nurturing individuals who often display a strong sense of cultural identity, leadership skills, and a commitment to addressing social issues (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Ndumu & Walker, 2021). HBCU alumni often become professionals in various fields, contributing to the development of the black middle class. Prominent HBCU alumni include Vice President Kamala Harris (Howard University), philanthropist and media mogul Oprah Winfrey (Tennessee State University), civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Morehouse College), U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall (Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and Howard University), and one of the first African American female CEOs of a Fortune 500 company, Rosalind Brewer (Spelman College) (Harvard Business Review, 2021).

Despite achievements in many areas, HBCUs battle persistent historical disparities in funding, support, and resources (Brown, Williams & Esters, 2021). Addressing these disparities is crucial, and one significant approach is to foster increased partnership development with

HBCUs. According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU, 2018), partnerships can offer the additional support necessary for HBCUs to thrive. Given the vital importance of HBCUs cultivating partnerships, this study uncovered the firsthand experiences of administrative leaders at HBCUs who have collaborated with external corporate partners. For the purposes of this study, administrative leaders included those who are identified or designated as partnership development leaders at their institution.

Background

The background of this study revolves around the unique nature of HBCUs and their historical challenges in the United States. While some might perceive HBCUs primarily as educational institutions, research indicates they serve a broader purpose. Arroyo and Gasman (2014) found that HBCU students undergo a meaningful development of values and identity, enriching their educational journey. However, while they are historically significant and impactful, HBCUs grapple with persistent disparities, particularly in terms of funding, support, and resources (Brown, Williams & Esters, 2021). Financial challenges have been a longstanding issue for HBCUs, leading to a reliance on partnerships to ensure their success and longevity (Homan, 1970). These challenges include disparities in endowments, federal funding, private donations, and research funding, resulting in differences in infrastructure, academic programs, research capacities, and faculty recruitment (Minor, 2008). The need for partnerships has become increasingly crucial to address these disparities and provide the supplemental support necessary for HBCUs to thrive.

The study's background also emphasizes the broader landscape of higher education partnerships and the unique challenges HBCUs face in this context. It explores the existing scholarly literature, identifying various types of partnerships, including federal-driven efforts,

corporate-led initiatives, non-profit collaborations, and philanthropic engagements (Minor, 2008).This research study aimed to contribute to the understanding of partnership development at HBCUs by uncovering and examining the lived experiences of administrative leaders who have established or engaged in corporate partnerships at their institutions. By uncovering their perspectives, the findings from this study sought to provide guidance to potential collaborators in establishing and enhancing strategic corporate partnerships with HBCUs (Scott & Hines, 2014). Recognizing the distinctive character and structure of HBCUs is considered essential for external corporate partners to navigate effectively, align their initiatives with institutional needs, and build trustful relationships. Overall, the findings from this study emphasize the historical importance of HBCUs, the challenges they face, and the critical role that partnerships play in addressing these challenges and fostering their sustained success.

Problem Statement

In a 2018 report from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), they express the importance of partnerships for HBCUs, as they create supplemental support like research and learning opportunities, business development, and workforce development opportunities (2018). Academic literature captures details about historical disparities and existing partnerships at HBCUs, like those with corporate involvement and government-driven partnerships; however, there is limited literature that captures the experiences of HBCU leaders in these partnerships and their guidance on how to best develop and sustain strategic partnerships. If scholarly literature continues to overlook the perspectives of HBCU leaders responsible for establishing and strengthening strategic external corporate partnerships, then potential collaborators may encounter difficulties in making connections with HBCUs. As a

result, HBCUs will continue to endure disparities in funding, support, and resources, all of which are essential components for their success.

Purpose Statement

Andrews et al. (2016) highlight the need for HBCUs to reduce their dependence on government support and explore alternative avenues for support, such as external funding sources and external partnerships. This study aims to explore the experiences of HBCU leaders who are tasked with establishing and strengthening strategic corporate partnerships. Potential insights garnered from this study will help guide potential collaborators in effectively initiating and improving strategic external partnerships with HBCUs. This research study identified, through a collection of the experiences of HBCU leaders, a comprehensive understanding of decision-making structures and processes concerning the development and sustainability of external corporate partnerships. The perspectives offered by HBCU administrative leaders hold the potential to overcome barriers and foster the future growth of corporate partnerships.

Research relevant to this study has focused on the perspectives of five HBCU leaders (Brown, Williams & Esters, 2021). This research addressed the noted limitations from the 2021 study, which included the sampling size and participant makeup, where only one out of five presidents included in the study was female (Brown, Williams & Esters, 2021). Additionally, previous research advocates for more diverse perspectives and an increase in the number of viewpoints on this topic, aligning with the objectives of this study (Brown, Williams & Esters, 2021). This study differentiates itself from other scholarly work as it captured additional perspectives from various HBCUs, included insights from different roles within the institutions, and sought to identify themes specifically on cultivating external corporate partnerships. In the

coming century, HBCUs must transcend historical disparities, considering their significance as a pillar and lifeline in the Black community (Favors, n.d.).

Significance of the Study

This study holds significance in contributing to the field of higher education by contributing to relevant HBCU literature and addressing the gap in the exploration of research conducted on partnership development between HBCUs and external corporate partners (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007). This research aimed to assist HBCUs in reducing dependence on government support by facilitating connections with external corporate partners, ultimately supporting strategic plans within higher education (Amey & Eddy, 2014). Understanding the decision-making processes and structures related to the development and expansion of external partnerships is a crucial focus of producing scholarly contributions (Scott & Hines, 2014). This knowledge benefits both HBCU leaders and potential partners, enabling the development of effective engagement strategies. Identifying and addressing barriers to collaboration has the potential to foster more meaningful connections between HBCUs and external corporate partners. This study addressed limitations from previous research, offering a more comprehensive understanding by incorporating diverse perspectives from various HBCUs, capturing stories from individuals in different roles within institutions, and focusing on corporate partnerships (Brown, Williams & Esters, 2021). Given the significance of HBCUs in the Black community, this study contributes to addressing historical disparities through external corporate partnerships, aiming to ensure the long-term thriving and resilience of these institutions (Minor, 2008). In summary, the importance of this research lies in its potential to enhance financial

sustainability, guide collaboration effectively, comprehend decision-making processes, overcome barriers, and contribute to the enduring success of HBCUs.

Research Question

This study employed a narrative inquiry approach to explore the lived experiences of administrative leaders within HBCUs who have collaborated with external corporate partners. The study was guided by one overarching research question:

> What are the lived experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) who have collaborated with external corporate partners in an effort to support, develop, and enhance their institutions?

This single research question guided the collection of HBCU administrative leaders' experiences in developing and sustaining external corporate partnerships.

Definition of Terms

Historically Black College or University (HBCU): Represents advanced academic institutions that were established between 1837 and 1964, with the purpose of educating black students who were left out of the educational process (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Partnerships: A collaborative effort involving two or more parties, such as higher education institutions, businesses, or social agencies, aiming to achieve a common objective (Eddy, 2010).

The South: The states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia, which are similar to one another in history, geography, and culture (Robson et al., 2019).

Token / Tokenism: Engaging in a practice, such as hiring individuals from minority groups to create the illusion of fair treatment - often done to avoid criticism (Vanderbilt University, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

The guiding conceptual framework for this study is Amey, Eddy & Ozaki's (2007) Partnership Development Model, which helps us understand how dynamic relationships form, function, and sustain or dissolve. The model particularly looks at partnerships with K-20 institutions, which this study narrowed down further to HBCUs. With increased partnerships occurring with external partners and higher education institutions, this study recognized how these relationships can provide a strategic means to achieve economic and institutional goals. The model has two major phases: the partnership development process and the process leading to sustainability. The model's first phase focuses on partnership development, covering antecedents, motivation, context, the partnership itself, feedback, and the crucial role of a champion. Motivation is highlighted, emphasizing the importance of trust, social capital, and relationship density. Champions possess high social capital and play a crucial role in partnerships, ensuring mutual benefits for all parties while preventing imbalances that could diminish motivation. The second phase addresses sustainability, acknowledging the risks of partnership termination and emphasizing the champion's role in advocacy, effective communication, and continuous feedback for long-term success. The study extends this model to explore partnerships involving HBCUs, contributing to the limited body of research in this area ultimately demonstrating the model's applicability to diverse institutional contexts.

Supporting Frameworks

The supporting conceptual frameworks for this study are influenced by Grace's (2002) identified characteristics of successful partnerships and Brown, Williams & Esters' shared leadership practices (2021). Grace's identified characteristics emphasize the growing importance of higher education partnerships driven by societal pressure and institutions' genuine

responsiveness to external needs. The ever-changing economic, social, political, and technological landscape demands continuous adaptation from colleges and universities. Pressures such as demographic shifts, rising costs, reductions in state funding, challenges in student retention and graduation rates, technological advancements, and global competition have stressed institutions, highlighting the necessity of developing strategic partnerships. Brown, Williams & Esters' shared leadership practices result from a 2021 study on partnership development at HBCUs. Through interviews with five HBCU presidents, their study explored leadership philosophies guiding partnership decisions. Although each president had distinct philosophies, five common practices emerged and have guided this study: prioritizing, being student-centered, being data-driven, fostering collaboration, and being innovative.

Scope of the Study

The researcher limited the scope of this study to administrative leaders serving at HBCUs in the South, with a specific look at HBCUs in North Carolina. The study was limited to North Carolina as it is home to 10 accredited HBCUs, five public and five private, representing a significant amount of HBCUs in a concentrated area (CREED, n.d.). The state is also home to some of the nation's largest non-HBCUs, which is relevant when addressing access and financial disparity issues. Administrative leaders invited to participate in the study serve in roles at the following senior levels: Chancellor/President, Vice Chancellor / Vice President, Provost, Institutional Advancement, or Dean, along with those designated to lead external partnerships for their institutions. Particularly, this study focused on re-telling the stories of those with experience working with or developing relationships with corporate partners.

Assumptions

This study operated under the presumption that the information gathered from participants was honest and truthful. To reinforce the study's commitment to honesty, participants were required to agree to and verbally acknowledge an informed consent form. Participants were reassured that the study was designed to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. This study utilized a narrative inquiry approach in the application of a qualitative methodology. Given the subjective nature of qualitative inquiry, the researcher interpreted and identified common themes based on the collected data.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized in five chapters: (1) introduction, (2) literature review, (3) methodology, (4) findings, and (5) discussion and conclusion. The first chapter introduces the history of HBCUs and their historical disparities, including external partnerships. It addresses the limited educational research available related to the study along with key takeaways from a related study conducted in 2021, which helped inform this study based on provided recommendations for further research. Chapter One introduces the research problem, purpose, and significance of the study, followed by the research question. This chapter includes a definition of key terms that were used throughout the study, an outline of the conceptual frameworks employed in the study, an overview of the study's assumptions, and concludes with a summary of all subsequent chapters.

Chapter two provides an in-depth review of the available scholarly literature and the conceptual frameworks. The detailed literature review covers a deeper look into the history of HBCUs and their historical disparities. It transitions to an overview of partnerships in higher

education. In addition, the chapter discusses historical partnerships found at HBCUs and provides an overview of the organizational structure at HBCUs. Chapter two concludes with a summary of theories and their relation to the study.

Chapter three details the methodology employed for this study. It includes a review of the research question and details the research design and rationale for the selected design. This chapter includes an overview of the study's population, sampling method, ethical considerations, confidentiality measures, and informed consent procedures. The chapter closes by describing the data collection process, processing steps, and analysis of the collected data according to the narrative inquiry methodology.

The fourth chapter outlines the findings from this study in a narrative format using Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative mode of analysis and paradigmatic mode of analysis (analysis of narratives). The findings are outlined by initially sharing a narrative of the participant's lived experiences of partnerships, followed by a synthesis of the narrative provided for each participant. Next, a paradigmatic analysis occurs, where experiences were assigned to themes. Contextual detail was included based on a vignette from each interview.

The fifth and final chapter provides a conclusion of the study and highlights overall findings from the study. Findings are aligned with the literature and connected to the framework. From there, noted implications for future practice of successful external corporate partnerships with HBCUs are shared in alignment with the literature. Chapter five concludes with limitations within the study and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Summary

The first chapter introduced the history and challenges of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), emphasizing their essential role in the education of Blacks. It highlighted

disparities in funding, support, and resources faced by HBCUs and the increasing importance of partnerships for their success. The chapter set the stage for the research problem, purpose, and significance, posing the overarching research question on the lived experiences of administrative leaders collaborating with external corporate partners. The background of the study emphasized the historical context, financial challenges, and the need for partnerships with HBCUs. It recognizes the broader scope of higher education partners and focuses on the unique challenges at HBCUs, which are further explored in Chapter Two. The problem statement addresses the limited scholarly literature that captures HBCU leaders' perspectives in partnerships and notes the potential consequences for HBCUs if these perspectives continue to be overlooked. The purpose of the study was framed in response to the call for reduced dependence on government support for HBCUs and explores alternative avenues through external partnerships. The study aimed to provide insights into decision-making structures and processes related to these partnerships. It distinguishes itself from a similar 2021 study by Brown, Williams & Esters, addressing its limitations. The research question focused on re-telling the lived experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year HBCUs collaborating with external corporate partners, guiding the collection of relevant insights. The definition of terms clarifies key concepts, and the guiding conceptual framework relies on Amey, Eddy & Ozaki's 2007 Partnership Development Model. The supporting conceptual frameworks incorporated characteristics of successful partnerships and shared leadership practices identified in previous studies. The scope was limited to administrative leaders at HBCUs in North Carolina, focusing on administrators with stories about cultivating corporate partnerships. Assumptions included the honesty of participant responses, reinforced by informed consent procedures. This study employed a narrative inquiry

approach, recognizing the subjectivity within qualitative research. The chapter concluded with a summary, setting the stage for subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Introduction

This qualitative case study aimed to identify the lived experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) who have collaborated with external corporate partners to support, develop, and enhance their institutions. This chapter provides an in-depth look at the study's conceptual foundation and a review of the literature related to this study. The literature review provides a comprehensive background on Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), disparities faced by these institutions, the importance of partnerships in higher education, and an overview of decision-making for partnerships with HBCUs.

History and Founding of Historically Black Colleges & Universities

This study was framed on the foundational aspects of what launched Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Since their inception in the early 1800s, HBCUs have played a critical role in the academic accomplishments and avenues for advancements for Black people. This era was characterized by the push from former slaves for increased access to state-funded education, which signifies the importance of HBCUs in facilitating educational opportunities for the Black community (Gasman & Esters, 2024; Anderson, 1988). The term Historically Black College and University (HBCU) represents advanced academic institutions established between 1837 and 1964 to educate black students who were left out of the educational process (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Providing a historical overview of HBCUs helps to better understand their purpose and impact on Black Americans. According to Bracey (2017), HBCUs originated during the era of legal segregation and the isolation of Blacks.

Even today, they continue to be closely associated with the ongoing struggle of Black communities for survival, progress, and equality in America.

Pre-Civil War

Throughout slavery, African Americans were denied access to education, with many states even outlawing the teaching of slaves to read or write (Minor, 2008). Slaveholders saw education as a threat to their control, fearing it could incite rebellion. Yet, despite these oppressive laws, enslaved Africans showed remarkable resilience in their pursuit of education, defying the bans imposed by southern states (Gasman & Esters, 2024). Before the Civil War, Blacks were banned in the South and strongly discouraged in the North from accessing an education. According to Roebuck and Murty (1993), it was at HBCUs that Black students were able to develop and enhance their black consciousness and identity, learn about black history, demonstrate racial pride, and embrace ethnic traditions; much of what they were unable to receive at predominately white institutions. Early on, this was critical for liberating and empowering newly freed slaves (Albritton, 2012). Education at HBCUs provided a pathway to becoming a full citizen with rights and opportunities. The founding of several HBCUs stemmed from the urgent need to address these systemic educational inequalities. With restricted access to education, the result was a limited number of Black schools that were established before the Civil War.

The first HBCU, established in 1837, was Cheney University of Pennsylvania, formerly the African Institute/Institute for Colored Youth (Gasman & Esters, 2024). This public institution was established by Quaker philanthropist and abolitionist Richard Humphreys, who created the school to educate people of African descent and prepare them as teachers (Cheyney University, n.d.). The next HBCU established was the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) in 1851,

formerly known as the Miner School for Colored Girls (UDC, n.d.). This private school was founded by Myrtilla Miner, an abolitionist who was a leader in teacher training for free African American women. In 1854, The Ashmun Institute, now known as Lincoln University, was created as a private institution in Pennsylvania. Founded by Presbyterian minister and Quakers John Miller Dickey and Sara Cresson, this school was established to "provide a higher education in the arts and sciences for male youth of African descent…" (Lincoln University, 2023). These institutions were created by white allies who were willing to go against the country's laws and racial divide to educate Blacks. Then, in 1856, Wilberforce University, formerly Wilberforce College, was established in Ohio as a private HBCU owned and operated by African Americans through the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church (Wilberforce University, n.d.). Wilberforce's President, "Daniel Payne [was] the first African American to lead a college in the country" (Gasman & Esters, 2024, p. 5). The creation of these first four HBCUs sparked the revolution of educated Blacks.

Table 1 provides a list of HBCUs that were founded prior to the Civil War.

Table 1. *HBCUs created prior to the Civil War*

Institution	**State**	**Founded**
Cheyney University	PA	1837
University of the District of Columbia	DC	1851
Lincoln University	PA	1854
Wilberforce University	OH	1856
Harris-Stowe State University	MO	1857

Post-Civil War

After the Civil War and the passing of the Emancipation Proclamation, there was a rise in the development of institutions of higher education for Blacks. The Emancipation Proclamation declared all enslaved persons free (National Archives, 2023). Organizations like the federal government's Freedmen's Bureau were tasked with "educating 4 million formerly enslaved African Americans" (Gasman & Esters, 2024, p.5). Along with various religious organizations, the Freedmen's Bureau helped establish over 20 additional HBCUs, most of which opened in the Southeastern region, as reflected in **Table 2** (ASHE, 2010).

In 1865, history was made as the first two HBCUs in the South were created: Shaw University and Atlanta University. Shaw University, formerly known as Raleigh Theological Institute and Shaw Collegiate Institute, in North Carolina, became the first private Baptist HBCU affiliated with the American Baptist Church and black missionary groups. Founded by Henry Martin Tupper, a soldier in the Union Army from Massachusetts, Shaw University would later become the first HBCU to offer a four-year medical school and law school to freed slaves (Gasman & Esters, 2024; Shaw University, n.d.). Atlanta University, now known as Clark Atlanta University, was established in Georgia by the American Missionary Association. Clark Atlanta University became one of the first institutions in the nation to award graduate-level degrees to Blacks (Clark Atlanta University, 2023). These institutions were unique as they could " craft their own curricula absent of outside influence and control. Many of the earliest leaders and teachers at Black colleges were White" (Gasman & Esters, 2024, p. 6). In 1866, Fisk Freed Colored School (now Fisk University) was created to educate former slaves, called Freedmen. The school was named after General Clinton B. Fisk, a commissioner of the Tennessee Freedmen's Bureau (Fisk University, n.d.). From there, the surge of HBCUs established

continued to spread, with both public and private institutions being created to educate freed slaves and their children. Many institutions that African Americans established for the African American community found themselves constrained by limited budgets, as they lacked access to funding and support from White missionaries (Gasman & Esters, 2024). In addition, there was a challenge with the creation of these institutions as "the generosity of White missionary organizations was often marked by racism as well as self-interest." The White missionaries had a focus on eliminating any societal deficiencies among Black people by providing them with education and instilling Christian values in them, thus preventing them from posing a threat to society. The historical context presented provides foundational knowledge which contributes to the significance of this study.

Table 2. *HBCUs created after the Civil War and Emancipation Proclamation*

Institution	**State**	**Founded**
Shaw University	NC	1865
Clark Atlanta University	GA	1865
Fisk University	TN	1866
Alabama State University	AL	1867
Barber-Scotia College	NC	1867
Fayetteville State University	NC	1867
Howard University*	DC	1867
Johnson C. Smith University	NC	1867

Table 2 (continued).

Morehouse College	GA	1867
St. Augustine's University	NC	1867
Talladega College	AL	1867
Hampton University	VA	1868
Claflin University	SC	1869
Dillard University	LA	1869
Tougaloo University	MS	1869
Allen University*	SC	1870
Benedict College	SC	1870
Paul Quinn College*	TX	1872
Wiley College	TX	1873
Bennett College	NC	1873
Knoxville College	TN	1875
Morris Brown College*	GA	1881
Tuskegee University*	AL	1881

Note. * Asterisk denotes institutions founded by African Americans for African Americans (Gasman & Esters, 2024).

Morrill Acts for Land Grant Schools

With the establishment of HBCUs came efforts on the political front to generate change for Black adult learners. In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln passed The Morrill Act (also called the Land-Grant College Act), revolutionizing higher education in the United States. This legislation provided federal land to each state to establish institutes of higher education, with a focus on teaching "agriculture and mechanical arts" (Morrill Act of 1862). This act resulted in the creation of over 50 land-grant colleges across the country; however, many Blacks were still denied access to the established land-grant colleges due to racial discrimination and separate but equal access. President Benjamin Harrison signed the Second Morrill Act of 1890 into law, which claimed to have ensured that Blacks were included by "requiring that states establish separate Land-grant institutions for Black students" and that Blacks were not restricted admission to prior established land-grant schools based on their race (USDA, n.d.). Under the Second Morrill Act of 1890, 19 HBCUs were created, again with the majority being in the country's Southeastern region. **Table 3** provides a list of all HBCUs that were created under the Land-Grant College Act. This act also provided federal funding to create land-grant HBCUs with a mission of supporting education and research in agriculture and mechanical arts. However, the Land Grant Acts still posed challenges to HBCUs, as segregation persisted through separate but equal policies. These policies empowered White politicians to influence the funding allocated to these institutions and the curriculum taught within them (Roth & Ritter, 2020). According to Bracey (2017), in the early 1900s, white land-grant institutions were receiving state appropriations at a rate 26 times more than predominantly Black colleges, providing further evidence of disparities across the racial divide.

Table 3: *1890 Land-grant HBCUs*

Institution	State	Founded
Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical (A&M) University	AL	1875
Alcorn State University	MS	1871
Central State University	OH	1887
Delaware State University	DE	1891
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical (A&M) University	FL	1887
Fort Valley State University	GA	1895
Kentucky State University	KY	1886
Langston University	OK	1897
Lincoln University	PA	1854
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (A&T) State University	NC	1891
Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical (A&M) University	TX	1876
South Carolina State University	SC	1896
Southern University and A&M College	SC	1880
Tennessee State University	TN	1912
Tuskegee University	AL	1881
University of Arkansas Pine Bluff	AK	1873

Table 3 (continued).

University of Maryland Eastern Shore	MD	1886
Virginia State University	VA	1882
West Virginia State University	WV	1891

Note. Institutions identified from data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2023)

Evolution and Struggles of Black Colleges

Since their inception, HBCUs have garnered support from individuals beyond the Black community, both in terms of establishment and financial support, with the shared goal of enhancing educational opportunities for Blacks in America. While these institutions played an important role in expanding access for Blacks, they faced challenges with autonomy. "Administrators (typically White men) who accommodated segregation were… the only leaders that White philanthropists tolerated; and in many cases, they were puppets (Gasman & Esters, 2024, p. 9). In the early 1900s, there was a struggle between the Black community and institutional leaders, as Blacks wanted more control over administrative and curriculum decisions at HBCUs (Rovaris, 2005). HBCUs that were religiously affiliated had a focus on teaching biblical principles with the hopes that they could convert freed slaves to Christianity and make them fit more easily into White society. The struggle for autonomy was exemplified in the narrative of Howard University. In 1877, there was tension between trustees and Black leaders when John Mercer Langston, an African American abolitionist and lawyer, aspired to become the institution's inaugural Black President. However, the trustees at Howard favored a White academic minister, sparking turmoil and revealing a manifestation of control by White trustees

and wealthy philanthropists. This challenge persisted at Howard University until the 1920s, significantly influencing Black higher education's administrative and academic frameworks (McPherson, 1970).

Many Black colleges had a focus on teaching reading, writing, and mathematics, as most freed slaves were prevented from accessing basic education during slavery (Gasman & Tudico, 2008). It was not until the late 1800s that blacks in the South began to achieve a literacy rate of 55 percent (Bracey, 2017). Hilliard (1995) claims that the concern was not that Blacks were incapable of learning but instead that there was a fear of what would come once they did. The early 1900s brought forth more HBCUs nationwide, as there was a continuous need to provide both primary and secondary education to Blacks (Browning & Williams, 1978). According to the U.S. Department of Education, legal segregation prevented Blacks from attending colleges in the South, and admission quotas prevented them from enrolling in the North; therefore, the majority of Black college students were enrolled at HBCUs for educational opportunities, as higher education did not become desegregated until after the late 1950s. Initial initiatives, such as President Harry S. Truman's Commission on Higher Education in 1946, were pivotal in advancing access to higher education for Black individuals (Gilbert & Heller, 2010). In the report titled "Higher Education for American Democracy," the Truman Commission articulated a vision for higher education that prioritized inclusivity, regardless of socioeconomic status. This vision advocated for enhanced financial aid and the establishment of community colleges to facilitate broader accessibility. The commission also championed increased federal involvement in supporting higher education, setting the stage for transformative changes. This momentum culminated in 1965 with the passage of the Higher Education Act, a landmark decision by the U.S. Department of Education. This legislation augmented federal funding for universities,

introduced student financial aid programs, and formally recognized institutions as Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) if they were founded to educate Black individuals and established before 1964 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

HBCUs Today

According to the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, there are currently more than 100 HBCUs located across the United States, serving nearly 300,000 students each year (The White House, 2021). Of the HBCUs today, approximately half are public institutions, and the other half comprises private and nonprofit institutions (NCES, 2022). While these schools only represent less than 5% of the colleges and universities in the nation, they enroll 11% of the Black college student population (Gasman, 2013) and produce nearly 20% of all Black graduates (UNCF, n.d.). HBCUs lead the record for higher education institutions to award baccalaureate degrees to black students in STEM fields. Per UNCF (n.d.) HBCUs have been acknowledged for playing a significant role in producing a considerable proportion of Black professionals, including 70% of Black medical professionals - dentists and physicians, 50% of engineers, 50% of public school teachers, and 35% of attorneys. This has been a noteworthy contribution to the formation and growth of the black middle class. **Appendix A** provides a full list of all current 4-year HBCUs.

After years of HBCUs being viewed as not as highly regarded as Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), HBCUs saw a significant turn in enrollment of African American students in 2020 after the “intense racial turmoil… resulting from the murder of George Floyd” (Gasman & Esters, 2024, p. 1) “During this turmoil, African American students… began enrolling at HBCUs at higher rates. Many African American parents, who in the past may have encouraged their children to attend PWIs, began to push their children to consider HBCUs.” According to the

National Center for Education Statistics, “HBCU enrollment increased by 7 percent between 2020 and 2023, compared to a 14 percent increase between 1976 and 2021” (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.) While this shift in enrollment has been a great sign for HBCUs, their historical financial disparities have proven to be a challenge when dealing with 21st-century learners.

Impact of Financial Disparities on HBCUs

Much of the research literature discussing partnerships involving HBCUs explores partnerships primarily motivated by the financial challenges faced by these institutions. HBCUs have historically had financial deprivation as a major hardship, so partnerships were needed to ensure their success and longevity (Homan, 1970). From their establishment, White-controlled state legislatures restricted financing of public HBCUs and higher education for Blacks. Some schools received financial support from religious groups, philanthropic Quakers, and the Freedmen Bureau; however, these funding organizations came with challenges. Many wanted to have control over the curriculum and administration of these institutions. there was still a challenge for public institutions that relied on government funding to keep their doors open (Rovaris, 2005). According to Minor (2008), disparities, including endowments, federal funding, private donations, research funding, and financial support for infrastructure and facilities, have resulted in notable differences in the quality of their infrastructure, academic programs, research capacities, technological resources, and faculty recruitment.

Brown and Burnette (2014) discuss how state funding inequalities have revealed themselves through various legal settlements and mandates, leading to additional financial support for HBCUs. This history dates back to The Morrill Act of 1890, which mandated states to fund institutions that enrolled Blacks. However, because of segregation, many states in the

South opted to create public HBCUs “for the sole purpose of having a legal beneficiary for the federal support” (Brown & Davis, 2001, p. 34). According to Smith (2021), an additional challenge of the Second Morrill Act was the federal-state matching grant funding process. The act stated that land-grant schools were to receive an appropriation from the federal government and a one-to-one match from their state government. Unfortunately, this process left funding decisions in the hands of White-controlled state legislatures, many of which would go on to refuse one-to-one matching, which also blocked federal funding.

Funding challenges continued into the 1900s, past World War II, when veterans were afforded GI bills. The G.I. Bill of Rights in 1944 was said to provide Black veterans with funding to pursue higher education; however, only 12 percent of Black veterans enrolled in colleges and universities due to limited enrollment options caused by segregation laws (Favors, 2019). With HBCUs not receiving adequate funding from the government, they could not expand their infrastructure and personnel to meet the needs of prospective Black scholars. This resulted in nearly 20,000 Black veterans being turned away from HBCUs, which again severely impacted funding (Turner & Bound, 2003).

Historical financial disparities reveal themselves in the South, especially in several legal cases in Mississippi. In 1975, a group of Black citizens initiated a class-action lawsuit against the state of Mississippi for perpetuating a dual-track system that segregated HBCUs from their predominantly White counterparts (Sum et al., 2004). That same year, the Institutions of Higher Learning addressed the disparity in state funding in Mississippi as three HBCUs (Mississippi Valley State University, Jackson State University, and Alcorn State University) received a total allocation of $13 million (Minor, 2008). Meanwhile, Mississippi State University, a PWI, received an appropriation of $13.8 million in state funding on its own that year. U.S. vs Fordice

(1992) was a major Supreme Court Case where Mississippi's discriminatory actions in higher education were called to the table. In this case, the Supreme Court had to address whether Mississippi was still acting on a dual system (one for White students and another for black students) (Minor, 2008; Sum et al., 2004). The case revealed that the system did have remnants of the prior dual system and that the state needed to take action to eliminate past segregation systems, including funding.

Endowments

Endowments are the lifeline for institutional support and stability for higher education institutions, yet HBCUs only have about 30% of their White counterparts' endowments (The Hunt Institute, 2022). As a result, their small endowments have led to limited funds available for essentials like daily operations, faculty salaries, scholarships, research, and expansion (Adams & Tucker, 2022). HBCU administrative leaders have had to take it upon themselves to establish fundraising and capital campaigns to support their endowments and scholarships for their respective institutions to support student outcomes' success. A 2021 report from the Century Foundation found that HBCUs have smaller endowments than their non-HBCU counterparts. Endowments at public HBCUs averaged nearly $7,000, while those at public non-HBCUs were three times greater. This was also the case with private institutions, where HBCU endowments were $25,000 per student and non-HBCU endowments were over $180,000 per student (The Century Foundation, 2021). On a 2021 Endowment ranking list, HBCUs rank 160th on the nation’s list, with Howard University having the largest endowment of all HBCUs. According to Weissman (2021), these limited endowments reflect historical state and federal underfunding, as HBCUs need over $50 billion in endowment funding to support the student loan debt incurred by their students.

Support Services

Disparities in resources and support services have also made it challenging for HBCUs to deliver a high-quality educational experience for their internal stakeholders. These disparities have included challenges with student support services (counseling and mental health), campus and technological infrastructure, library and research funding resources, and many others. A recent study in Forbes explored the underfunding of HBCUs when compared to their predominantly White counterparts, noting one of the most severe cases in North Carolina. In 2020, North Carolina A&T State University, the largest HBCU in the nation, received $9.5 million in research funding from the state legislature. In contrast, North Carolina State University, which has only 7 percent of its student population being black, was granted an additional $79 million for research during the same period (Adams & Tucker, 2022). Disparities in a field like research make it difficult for HBCUs to gain recognition, further restricting their access to other funding and partnership sources. That same year, the state legislature allocated $95 million to A&T, which resulted in $8,200 less per student compared to the $16,400 per student provided to NC State. This was a significant challenge and notable disparity as A&T expected to operate that year, with instructional expenses being over $7,500, leaving little funding available for support services. Funding for student services, which included admissions, counseling, registrar, and other key services, was limited to $726 per student, while at NC State, support services were $1,342 per student.

Infrastructure

Underfunding has also impacted campus infrastructure at HBCUs. In 2018, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) surveyed all accredited public HBCUs, inquiring about the impact of funding on their infrastructure (TMCF, 2021). The study revealed that almost

all HBCUs had nearly 50% of their buildings needing repair or replacement. Additionally, the public HBCUs in the study reported maintenance and repair delays amounting to an average of $67 million in backlog work due to a lack of funding in their normal budget cycles. A 2021 study by the Thurgood Marshall College Fund further explored this issue and discovered that HBCUs needed an average of $120 million in new infrastructure on campus. Due to historical underfunding, outdated and insufficient resources, such as academic buildings, residence halls, laboratories, and instructional technology, are used to educate and house students. Schools are sometimes left to function without modern technology, like broadband access (TMCF, 2021).

It is clear that the underfunding of HBCUs has led to a ripple effect of financial, support, and resource disparities. Andrews et al. (2016) state that HBCUs need to reduce their reliance on government support and consider putting efforts towards developing external funding sources and community partnerships. In a 2023 statement (U.S. Department of Education, 2023), Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said,

> Unacceptable funding inequities have forced many of the nation's distinguished HBCUs to operate with inadequate resources and delay critical investments in everything from campus infrastructure to research and development to student support services. To compete in the 21st century, we need state leaders to step up and live up to their legally required obligations to our historically Black land-grant institutions.

While state and federal leaders continue to have work to do to support HBCUs, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU, 2018) states that partnerships can provide the supplemental support needed to help HBCUs thrive like their non-HBCU counterparts. HBCU leaders should continue to focus efforts on forming strategic partnerships with external entities to help their institutions better position themselves for the future.

Partnerships in Higher Education

Higher education institutions must employ creative thinking to achieve their institutional goals. One effective approach is to establish partnerships with external entities. According to Eddy (2010), partnerships can be seen as strategic alliances or collaborations that provide fertile ground for joint efforts. Such collaborations are often formed because partners recognize the mutual benefit of working together to achieve shared goals, creating a win-win situation. Partnerships offer several advantages to higher education institutions, including financial support, expanded educational opportunities for students, staff, and faculty, improved public relations, bolstered operational infrastructure, and the facilitation of new knowledge development (Brown, Williams & Esters, 2021).

The AASCU (2018) identifies three key types of partnerships: community-driven, partnerships with other educational institutions, and P3s (public-private partnerships). While each type of partnership comes with its own benefits and risks, institutional leaders should diligently identify, develop, and implement partnerships that align with their culture and address their specific institutional needs.

Types of Partnerships

Although the AASCU (2018) outlines three primary partnership types, numerous others may closely resemble these. One type of partnership in higher education is the public-private partnership (P3). These collaborations between private entities and institutions are established to address specific needs, projects, or initiatives. P3 partnerships include a mix of public resources, private investments, and shared responsibilities aimed at achieving common goals. Examples of such partnerships include institutions collaborating with developers for ground leasing campus land or facilities, forming agreements to alleviate institutional debts, engaging in service

performance contracts, or participating in full-fledged joint ventures with shared governance between the institution and its recognized partner(s).

Another category of partnerships, as noted by the AASCU (2018), involves collaborations with other educational institutions. These may take the shape of articulation agreements, such as dual enrollment programs, where institutions collaborate with K-12 systems to facilitate learning opportunities for students to accrue college credits during their high school years. Additionally, consortium agreements foster cooperation among multiple institutions, allowing them to pool resources, such as administrative services, or collectively acquire new assets like information technology. This collaborative approach is most frequently observed within statewide systems, where sharing resources and collaborative efforts are common.

Community partnerships in higher education are vital in fulfilling an institution's fundamental mission of serving students and their local communities, extending their reach beyond the traditional academic setting (AASCU, 2018). Unlike some other types of partnerships, these collaborations are not typically formed with the primary goal of generating revenue or reducing institutional costs. According to the AASCU (2018), these partnerships are instrumental in helping institutions become responsible stewards of their communities. They may yield internal benefits, such as providing supplementary resources for student support or health services, or external-facing advantages, such as engagement in social justice initiatives or utilizing the institution’s expertise to contribute to the goals of non-profit organizations. These partnerships are one of the easiest forms of entry for partnership as they can be initiated at any level through administration, faculty, student organizations, etc. While they are easy to ideate, administrative approval may be needed in some cases, so understanding how decision-making happens at an institution is important.

Initiating Partnerships & Building Partnership Capital

External stakeholders connecting with higher education institutions must establish a clear understanding of partnership motivation. Eddy (2010) notes that different individuals often initiate partnerships and require decisions from administrative leaders, such as deans, vice presidents, and ultimately, the institution's president. Due to differing decision-making levels within institutions, external partners should target champions who can advocate for change and gain support from administrative leadership for grassroots partnership efforts.

Partnerships, over time, accumulate what research identifies as "partnership capital," achieved through the development of trust, a shared understanding of goals and outcomes, and the solidification of the partnership network to ensure longevity (Amey, Eddy, Campbell, & Watson, 2008, p. 49). The ultimate goal for any partnership, especially in higher education, is to build enduring partnerships.

Partnerships serve various purposes, from fostering general goodwill to sharing costs and facilities. Their overarching goal is to benefit a larger audience simultaneously through utilizing shared resources (Amey, Eddy, & Ozaki, 2007). Due to the potential of impacting the entire organization, partnerships often require administrative oversight and a dedicated commitment of resources. Trust, communication, and a common purpose are essential elements for the success of partnerships (Eddy, 2010). All involved parties must understand the motivation behind establishing a partnership. Eddy (2010) identifies key drivers for creating partnerships in higher education, including themes like educational reform, economic development, dual enrollment or student transfer, student learning, and resource savings. These drivers serve as a conceptual framework for the study.

HBCU Partnerships

Exploring general partnerships in higher education provides a comprehensive overview of common experiences across diverse institutions. However, for the scope of this study, the focus will shift towards a more in-depth examination of partnership and support efforts, specifically within HBCUs. Educational research covers HBCU partnerships, including federal-driven efforts, partnerships led by corporations, those driven by non-profit organizations, and philanthropic partnerships.

Federal Partnerships

Federal partnerships with HBCUs are collaborative initiatives aimed at addressing funding disparities, enhancing academic programs, strengthening research capabilities, and expanding overall institutional capacity (The White House, 2021). Various federal laws and programs demonstrate the government's commitment to facilitating and benefiting from the education of Black individuals. Key initiatives include the Higher Education Act of 1965, the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity through HBCUs, federal STEM initiatives, and the Biden-Harris administration's investment in HBCUs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Higher Education Act of 1965, signed by President Lyndon Johnson, had a significant impact on HBCUs by creating programs to support underrepresented populations. Title III funding, Pell Grants, work-study programs, and TRIO programs were established to provide federal support to institutions serving minority and low-income students, directly benefiting HBCUs (American Association of Community Colleges, 2022). Pell Grants, in particular, have remained a primary source of access to higher education for Black students, with approximately 70 percent of HBCU students being Pell-eligible UNCF (2023).

President Jimmy Carter's Executive Order 12232 in 1980 led to the creation of the "White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity through HBCUs" (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). This initiative aimed to increase opportunities and access for HBCUs to participate in federally sponsored programs, addressing barriers to participation. Subsequent administrations, including those of Presidents George H.W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden, renewed and updated the initiative.

Federal STEM partnerships play an important role in promoting diversity and inclusivity in STEM fields at HBCUs (Shultz, et al., 2011). Programs like the HBCU Excellence in Research (EiR) from the Department of Defense, HBCU-UP initiative with the National Science Foundation, and the Department of Energy's Clean Energy Education Prize provide support for research capabilities, STEM education, and workforce development at HBCUs (National Science Foundation, n.d.).

The Biden-Harris Administration has made historic investments in HBCUs, particularly through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). The ARP Act provided $3.6 billion in support, including the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF), which offered financial assistance to HBCUs for student support and campus reopening (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The administration also pioneered new federal programs, such as the Department of Commerce's funding for broadband internet, equipment, and IT personnel, to 43 HBCUs (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2023). In summary, federal partnerships and initiatives emphasize the government's commitment to supporting HBCUs, addressing funding disparities, and promoting excellence and equity in education and research.

Corporate Partnerships

Corporate partnerships with HBCUs have been approached with the intent of fostering collaboration and aiming for mutual benefit. Major companies, including Google, Walmart, Coca-Cola, Microsoft, Verizon, IBM, Home Depot, Bank of America, and General Motors, have made substantial investments in HBCUs (Lynch, 2023). These investments aim to support academic programs, increase Black graduate hiring through workforce development initiatives, and enhance campus infrastructure. Notably, Google, for instance, has committed over $50 million to its partnership with HBCUs (UNCF, 2023). This includes initiatives like the Tech Exchange immersive program, the Pathways to Tech initiative, and the Google in Residence program, all dedicated to teaching and promoting computer science skills among HBCU students. Furthermore, Google has joined forces with North Carolina A&T State University, Morehouse College, and Hampton University to invest in upgrading campus and technical infrastructure, bolstering career development efforts, and encouraging students to pursue tech careers.

While numerous corporations have established partnerships with HBCUs, it is crucial to this study to recognize that diverse factors drive corporate collaborations. Some of these factors stem from corporate deficiencies, while others are socially motivated. HBCUs are a focal point for many corporations, serving as direct sources for diversity hires (Marcus, 2022). Although this can be advantageous for HBCU students, it is imperative for corporations to approach these relationships intentionally (Odisho, 2023). In Odisho's interviews with four Chief Diversity Officers from large corporations, key tips for HBCU recruiting were collected, emphasizing the importance of building trusting relationships and supporting the institution beyond student hiring. The surge in socially motivated partnerships in 2020, spurred by the public outcry

following George Floyd's killing, led several Fortune 500 companies to establish new collaborations. Floyd's death brought attention to racial inequities, motivating corporations and philanthropists to contribute non-discretionary funds (Kumah-Abiwu, 2023). This study aims to dig deeper into the narratives behind these relationships, seeking to understand the intentionality and sustainability of HBCU and corporate partnerships.

Non-Profit & Philanthropic Partnerships

Nonprofit and philanthropic partnerships with HBCUs are established to address specific social, educational, or community-focused objectives (Gasman & Esters, 2024). Partnerships often involve the contributions of financial support, grants, or other resources to HBCUs to facilitate initiatives aligned with the partners' missions. Notable partners include the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and philanthropist MacKenzie Scott.

The UNCF, formed in 1944 by Frederick D. Patterson, aimed to create an alliance of Black colleges to secure funding and increase access to education for Black students. Over the years, UNCF has grown to support 37 HBCUs, impacting over 500,000 students with $5 billion in funding (UNCF, n.d.). The TMCF, established in 1987, supports public HBCUs by providing scholarships to students who may lack access otherwise. Representing 47 HBCUs and Predominantly Black Institutions, TMCF has awarded over $300 million in scholarships and boasts a 97% graduation rate for its scholars (TMCF, 2022). The Gates Foundation, starting with the Gates Millennium Scholars program in 1999, has supported HBCUs through educational grants and scholarships (Gates Millennium Scholars, n.d.). In 2020, The Just Project invested $15 million in HBCUs to enhance COVID-19 testing efforts (Padilla, 2020). A recent contribution of $100 million aims to transform HBCUs' enrollment, workforce development, and

public presence (Seltzer, 2022). The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has offered grants to HBCUs, focusing on arts and humanities initiatives, including faculty development, curriculum enhancements, and cultural institution strengthening (Mellon Foundation, n.d.). In 2020, philanthropist MacKenzie Scott made a significant contribution of $560 million in unrestricted funds to 23 HBCUs, one of the largest philanthropic gifts, addressing disparities and boosting endowments following the death of George Floyd (Adedoyin, 2021). Collectively, these partnerships stand as a testament to the transformative power of collaboration between philanthropic entities and HBCUs, which foster educational opportunities, reduce disparities, and empower future generations of students.

HBCU Senior Leadership Roles in Partnership Development

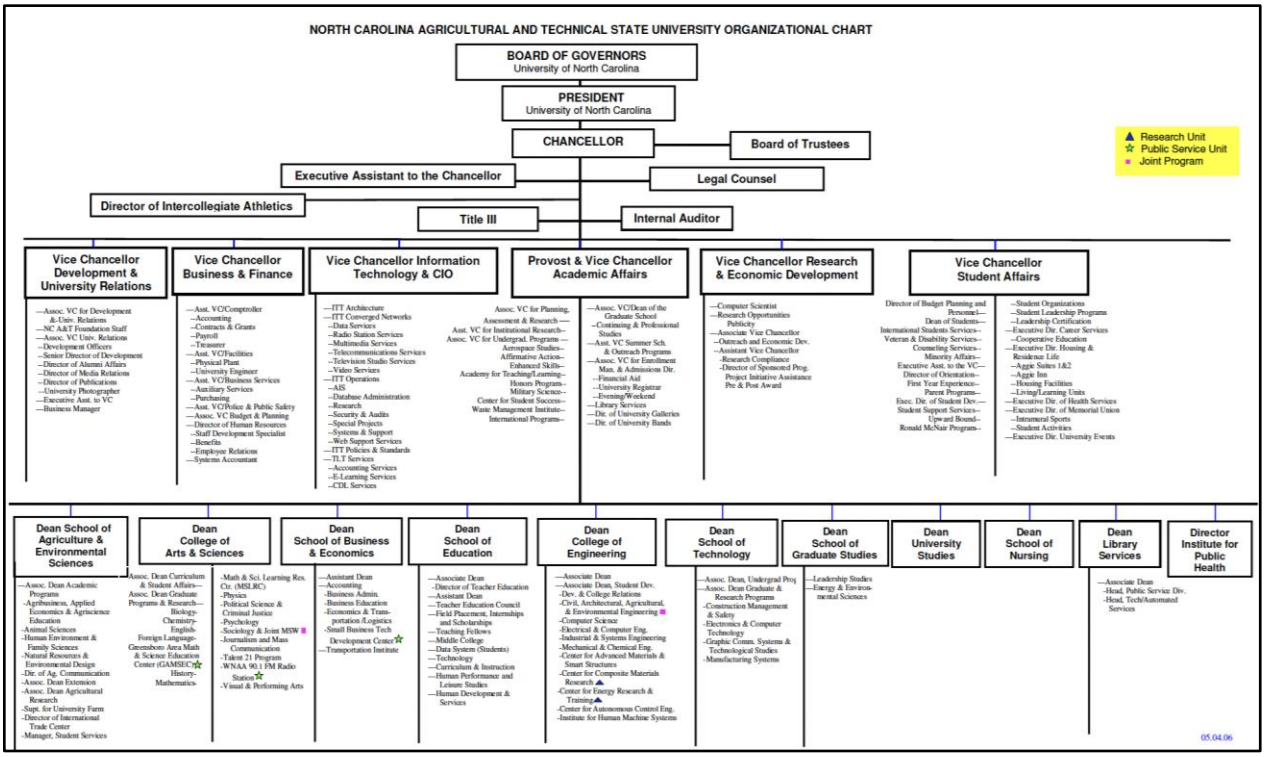
The aim of this study is to collect the experiences of administrative leaders serving at HBCUs, which can serve to guide potential collaborators in establishing and enhancing strategic external partnerships by gaining insights into the perspectives of their leadership practices. Recognizing the organizational structure of HBCUs is essential for external corporate partners to establish a sense of reporting variations among different institutions. Understanding the organizational structure will enable partners to tailor their programs and initiatives to align with the needs of their desired HBCU partners, enable effective communication by working with the right stakeholders, ease the navigation of decision-making, and ultimately help partners build trust and foster the right relationships early on (Scott & Hines, 2014).

At HBCUs, the organizational structure typically follows a hierarchical and top-down model, with faculty, staff, and students receiving direction from upper administration (Scott & Hines, 2014). The leadership hierarchy includes a Chancellor or President at the top, followed by vice presidents or provosts, academic deans, department chairs, and faculty. Hyatt (2015)

acknowledges that the administrative structures of HBCUs may vary based on factors such as size, foundation, and political structure (public vs. private). However, three consistent elements across HBCUs are the presence of a president/chancellor, a board of trustees, and senior administration, all significantly influencing the institution's culture and decision-making.

The responsibility for managing external relationships is often placed on the president of the institution (Schexnider, 2013). This role encompasses working with the governing board, overseeing the management team, fostering relationships with students, alumni, faculty, and staff, as well as engaging in fundraising and cultivating external partnerships. Some HBCUs have dedicated Institutional Advancement or External Relations offices coordinating these efforts for external partnerships (Barrett, 2006; Gasman, 2000). The size of Institutional Advancement and External Relations teams can vary depending on the institution's size and fundraising priorities (Tindall, 2008). The primary focus of this department is fundraising, alumni relations, and institutional advancement, aiming to secure financial support and involve alumni in supporting the university. **Figure 1** illustrates an organizational chart obtained from North Carolina A&T State University (NCAT, 2006). This specific chart was chosen because NC A&T is one of the largest HBCU institutions in the nation, offering a representation of the diverse levels and layers of roles and decision-makers within the organization (Anderson, 2022).

Figure 1: *North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University organizational chart*



Note. This figure shows an organizational chart outlining various roles at an institution of higher education. From North Carolina A&T State University, 2006, About *Us*. https://www.ncat.edu/_files/pdfs/about/ncat-org.pdf

One challenge in navigating potential partnerships with HBCUs, is their perceived top-heavy structure, as noted by Svrluga (2015). The limited personnel and financial resources of HBCUs result in leaders having extensive power and becoming overextended (Evans et al., 2002). Svrluga emphasizes that HBCUs often grant their executives and administrators more power than non-HBCUs. While approaching the top leadership may seem like a direct entry point for external partners, the challenge lies in the potential slow response of top-heavy organizations due to the multitude of daily responsibilities (Svrluga, 2015).

Despite the unique nature of each HBCU, understanding their organizational structure is foundational for corporate partners to meaningfully engage, foster effective collaboration, and contribute positively to the growth and development of these institutions. This study aims to better understand decision-making structures and processes related to developing and expanding external corporate partnerships. The insights gained from the perspectives of HBCU administrative leaders have the potential to reduce barriers to connection and promote the future development of corporate partnerships.

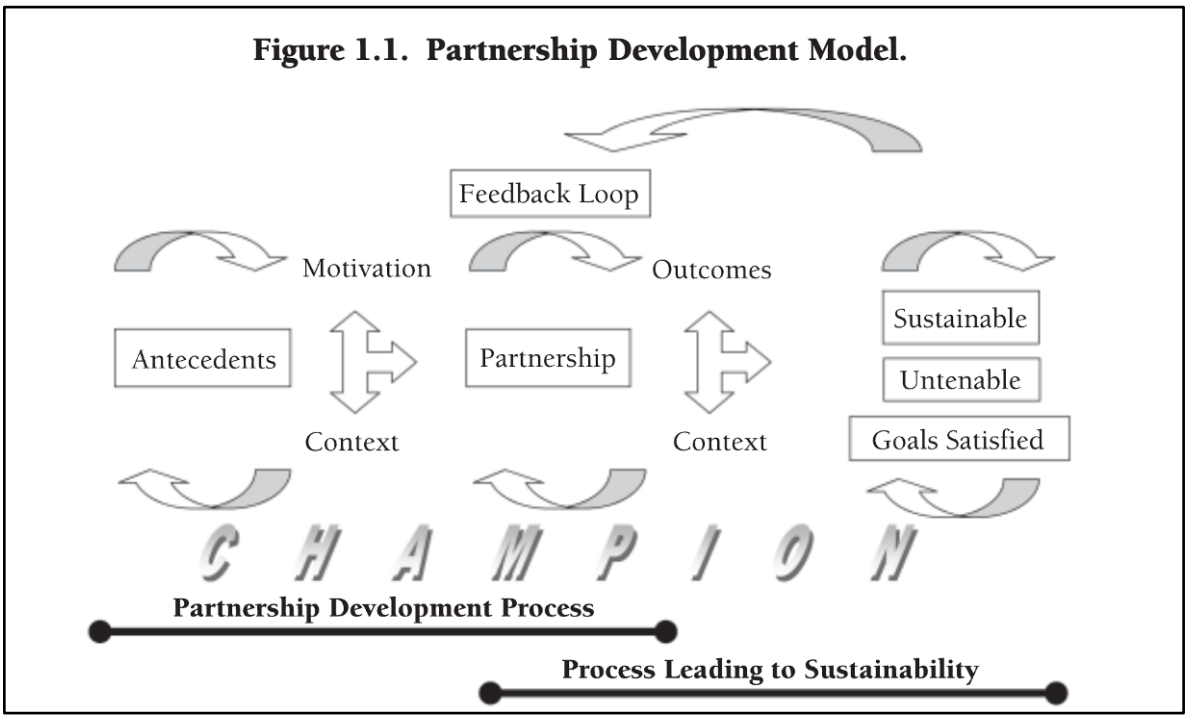
Conceptual Framework

Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki's (2007) Partnership Development Model

In 2007, Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki created a "multidimensional model based on the literature on K-20 partnerships" that captures their dynamic partnership relationships, including those with external partners, like corporations (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007, p. 9). This model incorporates Stauss' negotiated order theory, examining the origins of partnerships; Weick's sense-making theory, which helps to contextualize partnerships and understand diverse perspectives; and Amey, Brown, et al.'s interdisciplinary collaboration framework, addressing how partners collaborate. In introducing the model, the authors acknowledge the increase in partnerships with higher education institutions. They emphasize how these partnerships are seen as a good approach to achieving not just economic but also institutional goals (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007). Simultaneously, these collaborations play a crucial role in supporting the learning and development of the most important stakeholder, students. When examining the reasons behind institutions engaging in partnerships with external entities, the authors share that drivers

include external pressures, technology requirements, the sharing of facilities and resources, and leveraging personal connections.

Figure 2: *Amey, Eddy & Ozaki's 2007 Partnership Development Model*



Note. This figure shows the Partnership Development Model, which is used as the guiding framework for this study. Permission requested from Wiley Publishing on March 22, 2024. From Amey, M.J., Eddy, P.L. and Ozaki, C.C. (2007), Demands for partnership and collaboration in higher education: A model. New Directions for Community Colleges, 2007: 5-14. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1002/cc.288

The model is outlined to follow a partnership development process with the goal of achieving long-lasting collaboration and sustainability, as seen in **Figure 2**. It is broken down into elements like antecedents, motivation, context, the partnership itself, feedback, and most importantly, the role of a champion who understands, manages, and assesses the partnership. The first phase of the model focuses on the partnership development process. This phase includes

antecedents, factors that can promote the establishment of a partnership, including "external policies or regulations, prior relationships, resource needs, or a challenging issue…" (Amey, Eddy, Ozaki, 2007, p. 10). According to the model, in this initial phase, it is important to recognize the roles and expectations within the relationship. Additionally, key drivers like motivation and the context of the partnership need to be firmly established. In this model, context refers to the rationale and need for both parties to form a partnership. Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki highlight the significance of motivation, emphasizing that each party should be driven to actively pursue the partnership, even when it is formed out of a need. "State mandates, declining institutional enrollment or revenue, opportunities to share costs, grant funding initiatives, community needs, limited instructional capacity in certain subject matter, and unused facilities are just some examples of context that may stimulate the need for partnering" (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007, p. 10). Within a partnership, each party contributes social capital, which becomes a valuable resource throughout the relationship. Trust is a crucial component of motivation, as it requires partners to have confidence in each other's ability to collaboratively meet the partnership's goals. This aspect is also closely tied to "the density of the relationship, which is based on the closeness of relationships, adds to the amount of power any one or more partners bring to the partnership" (Amey, Eddy, Ozaki, 2007, p. 11). For example, a superficial partnership may lack the necessary trust and engagement needed, which can potentially lead to a more transactional relationship.

The role of a champion emerges as the most crucial factor in this model. A champion serves as the most indispensable resource in a partnership as they possess the highest level of social capital and the ability to drive the partnership's objectives forward (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007). It is not uncommon to find champions on both sides, in fact, it is often needed. Having the

right decision makers at the table is just as important as parties involved in the partnership should have the necessary access and permissions to the organization's capital. This organizational capital - resources, information, and/or processes - becomes a great source of power in the collaboration.

Ensuring that the partnership remains mutually beneficial is important to focus on as a partnership moves from the development phase to the sustaining phase. If the balance tips, with one party gaining more advantages than the other, then there's a risk of diminishing motivation. When motivation is lacking, the risk of dissolution of the partnership increases. Remaining agile throughout the partnership process is the key to success. This ongoing assessment by the champion(s) fosters robust partnerships with the potential for sustained longevity.

In the second phase of the model, which centers on achieving sustainability, Amey, Eddy & Ozaki dive into "the long-term projections for the collaboration" (Amey, Eddy, Ozaki, 2007, p. 11). This phase encompasses considerations such as sustainability, including potential setbacks, dissolution, and fulfillment of the initial goal. Unfortunately, all partnerships carry the inherent risk of termination at any point in the relationship, whether due to goal achievement or project dissolution. The champion's role becomes most important in this phase as they are the leading advocate for the partnership. In this model, the champion can be anyone supported by the positional leader or the leader themselves, which varies from conventional change management models where partnership leaders typically hold formal authority. Effective communication with all involved parties and stakeholders is important for the champion as they work to prevent the unwarranted dissolution of the partnership. This involved a continuous process of seeking and acting upon feedback, initiating early assessments to ensure alignment with the intended outcomes, and allowing feedback to shape decisions and contextual understanding throughout

the partnership. (Amey, Eddy, Ozaki, 2007) This proactive approach ensures that parties can make the most informed decisions. This approach helps to minimize the need to waste time and resources without yielding productive outcomes. In this phase, the champion's leadership can help to ensure the relationship remains mutually beneficial and can potentially lead to an expansion of the partnership.

This framework serves as the guiding foundation for my research, exploring the unique relationship between HBCUs and external corporate partners. Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki acknowledge the limited research dedicated to examining partnerships from the perspective of four-year institutions. This study sought to continue adding the existing research by extending its application to the perspective of HBCUs, an area that has been historically understudied. The objective of this research was to demonstrate the applicability of the model by examining the experiences of HBCU leaders who have engaged in partnerships with corporations.

Supporting Conceptual Frameworks

Brown, Williams & Esters' Shared Leadership Practices

The conceptual framework for this study was built upon Brown, Williams & Esters' shared leadership practices. In a 2021 research study conducted by Brown, Williams, and Esters at the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Institute for Leadership, Equity & Justice at Rutgers University, the focus was on partnership development at HBCUs. The study involved interviews with five HBCU presidents, exploring their leadership philosophies guiding decisions regarding partnership development (Brown, Williams & Esters, 2021). While each president presented distinct philosophies, five common practices emerged: prioritizing, being student-centered, being data-driven, fostering collaboration, and being innovative. Although not all presidents

emphasized every practice, three core areas that were unanimously deemed important were the student-centered, data-driven, and innovative nature of partnerships. These shared leadership practices, identified in the 2021 study, are integrated into this study to further examine participants' perspectives. Understanding these leadership practices aims to provide external corporate partners with insights into the expectations of HBCU leaders regarding partnerships.

Grace's Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

An additional conceptual framework for this study was Grace's (2002) identified characteristics of successful partnerships. Grace argues that increased societal pressure and a genuine desire by institutions to be more responsive to external needs and conditions has led to the expansion of higher education partnerships. The evolving landscape of economic, social, political, and technological factors has created a dynamic environment that requires colleges and universities to adapt and react continuously. Changes in demographics, including shifts in age and diversity, rising costs associated with higher education leading to increased student debt, reductions in state funding for higher education, a rise in campus hostility, challenges related to the retention and graduation rates of diverse student populations, particularly students of color, the persistent push for technological advancement, and a perceived decrease in the quality of graduates amid a fiercely competitive global economy have collectively placed significant stress on institutions. These pressures necessitate the need for institutions to develop strategic partnerships.

Much of the scholarly literature discussing partnerships involving HBCUs explores partnerships primarily motivated by the financial challenges faced by these institutions. HBCUs have historically had financial deprivation as a major hardship, so partnerships were needed to ensure their success and longevity (Homan, 1970). "For the last 100 years or so, colleges and

universities have nurtured informal relationships with business and industry and vice versa. These relationships have recently become more frequent and more formal" (Garland, 1985). Grace (2002) identifies partnerships as an "understanding and agreement of two or more parties that they will work together on a given problem, task, or enterprise" (Grace, 2002, p. 8). Partnerships require varying degrees of trust and flexibility when sharing resources, people, technology, and expertise. Partnerships build an institution's capacity to create bridges for students to connect with the world outside of campus through the development of social, intellectual, and political capital.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this narrative inquiry explored the lived experiences of administrative leaders within 4-year HBCUs who have actively engaged with external partners. The primary aim of this study was to uncover valuable insights into the collaborative efforts aimed at supporting, developing, and enhancing their institutions. This chapter laid the groundwork for the study by diving into the conceptual foundation and reviewing relevant literature. The literature review not only highlighted the unique qualities of HBCUs and the challenges they face but also recognized the crucial role that partnerships play in the landscape of higher education. With the Partnership Development Model from Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki (2007) serving as the guiding conceptual framework for the study, the researcher could explore firsthand experiences tied to components of the model. The supporting conceptual frameworks, presented by Grace (2002) and Brown, Williams, and Esters (2021), help the researcher to pinpoint particular strategies and attributes that are crucial for initiating and maintaining corporate partnerships with HBCUs based on the study's participant cohort's lived experiences. As we

work to better understand the decision-making processes related to partnerships with HBCUs, this study contributes meaningful perspectives to existing scholarly literature.

CHAPTER 3 - QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and rationale, the study sample population, and the data collection and analysis process taken to produce findings. The narrative inquiry research method was used to help answer the research question:

> *What are the lived experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) who have collaborated with external corporate partners in an effort to support, develop, and enhance their institutions?*

Research Design and Rationale

Historically Black Colleges and Universities have acquired a lot of attention in the last decade, yet there has been a limited knowledge base available connecting the experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year HBCUs and their working relationships with external corporate partners who seek to support, develop, and enhance their institutions. Brown & Freeman (2004) stated that HBCUs have limited empirical research, as much of it has been colloquial and anecdotal, which has left a void in scholarly literature. Qualitative research has affirmed this research topic needs "to be explored and understood because little research has been done on it or because it involves an understudied sample, then it merits a qualitative approach" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 19).

For this study, a qualitative narrative inquiry approach was the most appropriate methodology to investigate the lived experiences of a unique population of administrative leaders from 4-year Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs). Narrative inquiry was the best qualitative approach for this study because it allowed space for "various methodological

approaches to analyzing stories." More specifically, this study explored the psychological approach to a narrative inquiry, which "emphasizes inductive processes, contextualized knowledge, and human intention [and] acknowledges cognitive, affective, and motivational dimensions of meaning-making." (Merriam & Tisdell, 2022, p. 35).

Population

The population for this study was limited to administrative leaders at HBCUs in North Carolina. It was further narrowed by only recruiting study participants who serve in the following capacities: Chancellor/President, Vice Chancellor / Vice President, Provost, Institutional Advancement, or Dean, or those identified or designated as partnership development leaders within HBCUs. The narrative inquiry approach was used to collect stories about corporate partnership experiences and, in return, provide guidance to corporations, HBCU leaders, and future researchers based on the stories and themes captured.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

The researcher communicated with administrative leaders from HBCUs located in North Carolina by inviting them to participate in the study via email (**Appendix B**). Email addresses were pulled from each institution's public directory. Within the initial communication email, participants were invited to complete a screening questionnaire (**Appendix C**), confirming their interest in the study. The screening survey collected demographic information, confirmed their HBCU affiliation, provided an opportunity to collect responses related to the conceptual frameworks, and confirmed interest in a 60–90-minute interview about their experiences with developing corporate partnerships. This study employed a purposeful snowball sampling method to collect additional participants. If participants did not meet the parameters of the study, they were asked to identify others at their institution who met the study's eligibility criteria and share

their email addresses. If participants met the parameters of the study, they were asked to review and agree to informed consent (**Appendix D**) and provide their availability to interview - all within the screening process. The researcher then sent an email to schedule virtual interviews with all participants who met the study's parameters. The email confirmation (**Appendix E**) provided the date, time, and virtual meeting link. Using the interview protocol (**Appendix F**), virtual interviews were conducted using the Zoom video/audio conferencing tool, lasting approximately 60-90 minutes.

Instrumentation & Data Collection

Once schedules were confirmed, the researcher conducted seven in-depth interviews. The researcher used a semi-structured interview approach because it provided an opportunity to establish a natural conversation flow between the interviewer and the participant. This enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions throughout the interview (Kallio et al., 2016). These follow-up questions were needed as participants were asked to recall previous events and their perceptions of those events, which required further clarification and probing for more information (Barriball, 1994).

Prior to the start of each interview, the researcher asked each participant to identify a pseudonym for their first name and one for the name of the institution. The pseudonyms were used throughout the interviews to ensure confidentiality and de-identification. The interview protocol (**Appendix F**) included questions related to the participant's experiences working with external corporate partners. The protocol was structured to collect stories in an effort to make the connection between each participant's experiences and the context of the corporate partnership meaningful (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006). More specifically, each participant's attitude and perceptions of external corporate partnerships, the decision-making process when considering

partnerships, expectations of those partnerships, any challenges experienced, and ultimate outcomes from partnerships. The researcher used the scripted interview protocol with detailed questions and optional follow-up prompts, to ensure similar interview experiences occur.

Due to the researcher's travel and distance limitations, interviews conducted in this study were performed via Zoom (2024), a video/audio conferencing tool, where transcripts and recordings were secured through password-protected accounts hosted by NC State University. These tools were used to record both video and audio from the participants, which allowed the researcher to study both verbal and nonverbal responses. These tools also allowed the researcher to capture transcription for each interview. Transcription was automatically captured by using the Otter.ai (2024) application. Post-interview, the automated transcripts allowed the researcher to listen to the recording while reviewing the transcription, allowing for necessary edits to be made.

During the interview process, the researcher also used the memoing technique to take notes and record observations. Memoing involved capturing the researcher’s reflections, insights, and interpretations as data was being collected. Through memoing, the researcher was able to quickly identify patterns and themes that emerged (Birks et al., 2008). To ensure credibility, the researcher also used member checking, where participants were given a copy of their interview transcripts and asked to review the transcript to ensure the accuracy of the interview, as well as an appropriate depiction of their shared lived experiences (Kornbluh, 2015). All transcripts and memos were then exported to the researcher’s Google Drive (linked to their NC State University Account), where they remained accessible for data processing. Data was triangulated through a combination of reviewing transcripts, memoing, and member checking.

Confidentiality

The informed consent forms shared with participants were used to detail how confidentiality was ensured and their data were protected. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the interview process at any time. Prior to starting each interview, participants were asked if they had questions about the consent form and were asked to verbally acknowledge consent before proceeding with the interview. The use of pseudonyms in this research study provided an avenue to protect participants' identities and ensure privacy for participants (Creswell, 2014). Self-selected pseudonyms were used to de-identify participants and their institutions, protect their confidentiality, and maintain the trustworthiness of the data. Master crosswalks, which connected their names and emails to the data, were eliminated once data collection was completed.

Data Processing

The researcher used a computer-aided data analysis software called ATLAS.ti web (v7.1.3) to organize the data from each interview (Friese, 2012). All transcripts were uploaded to ATLAS.ti and saved together as a project that was password-protected to ensure data safety. Labels were assigned to each transcript on ATLAS.ti. Once labels were made and transcripts were available for processing, the researcher made decisions around coding and forming conclusions that were tied to the guiding conceptual framework from Amey, Eddy & Ozaki. These codes and notes were stored in ATLAS.ti and acted as a resource for the researcher later on in the study.

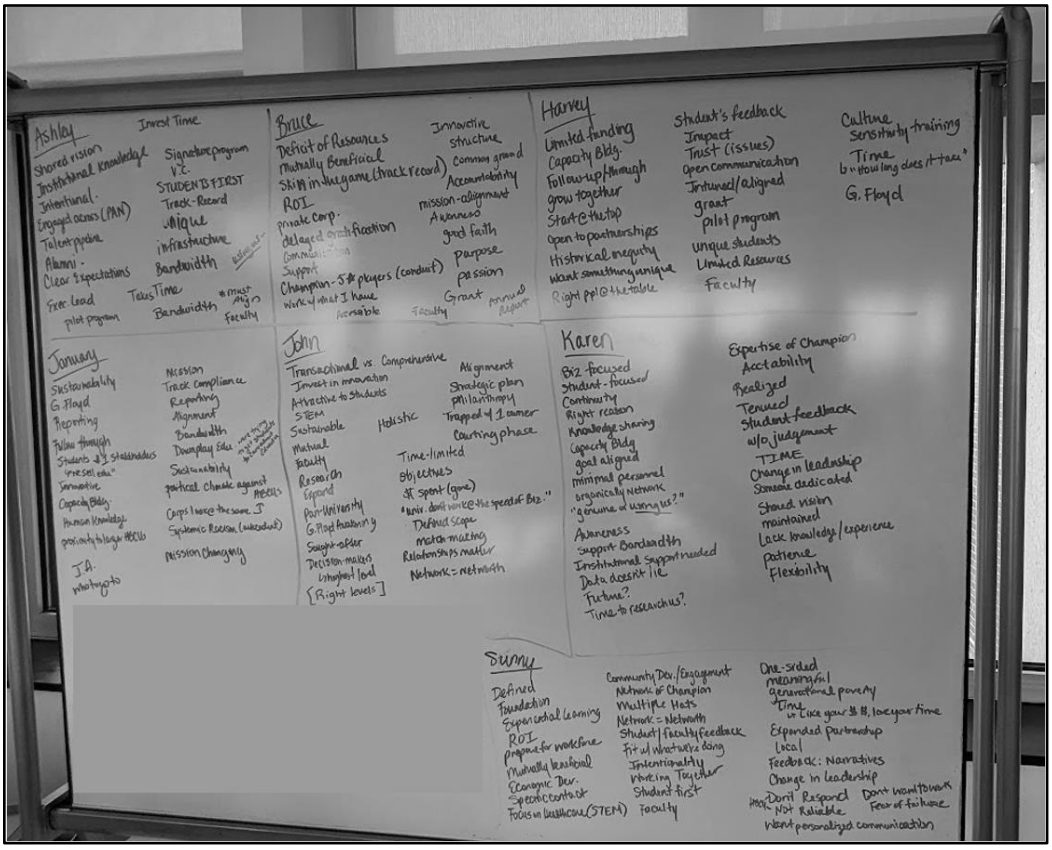
Data Analysis

The researcher used method triangulation to analyze the data collected through various methods (interview transcript, researcher memoing, and member checking). This research strategy helped the researcher mitigate bias and ensure the validity of the data collected (Fusch et al., 2018). This study included narrative analysis, as well as paradigmatic analysis, to analyze the narratives, as suggested by Polkinghorne's (1995) types of narrative analysis. A paradigmatic analysis was most appropriate for this study as it further clarified the data beyond just a narrative analysis (a form of storytelling and retelling of information) and took into account the researcher's ability to combine elements captured in the stories and place them into themed categories (Bruner, 1985).

A narrative analysis was used to collect and synthesize the stories from each participant. Emplotting the data consisted of analyzing narrative data that consisted of "actions, events, and happenings, in order to produce coherent stories" (Kim, 2016, p. 197). This form of analysis allowed the researcher to differentiate each participant's experience and deem them unique in their own way (Polkinghorne, 1995). Each interview was initially coded using open coding, which is where labels (nodes) were formed. This process included adding the transcripts and key highlights from the researcher's memos and field notes into ATLAS.ti. Next, leveraging the ATLAS.ti generator for axial coding, the labels (nodes) were grouped into categories of like terms. Narrative inquiry is rooted in the compilation of extensive notes and photographs of the evidence of detailed interpretations of the data, which contribute to the findings (Pino et al., 2022). **Figure 3** shows the labels that were formed from each interview. The researcher captured the labels created and used them as a reference to double-check the categories that were formed

from the ATLAS.ti generator, which contributed to the reflexivity of the study. There were over fifty categories identified based on the labels.

Figure 3: *Photo of the labels formed from participant interviews, recorded and captured by the researcher for reference.*

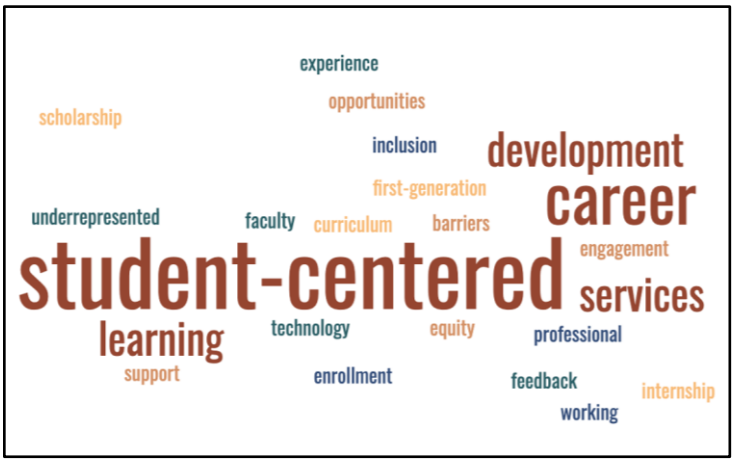


Finally, selective coding was used to identify key themes based on all of the categories. The key themes identified in this study included the ***importance of being student-centered when developing partnerships***, taking a ***tailored approach by making intentional efforts towards establishing mutually beneficial partnerships***, the ***impact of champions who drive partnership initiatives***, and how ***capacity building impacts partnership results***. In an effort to provide a visual representation of the evolution of codes from categories to themes, a word cloud for each theme was created based on the most common codes and categories (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014). **Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7** show the categories that were used to formulate the key themes.

Theme 1: The Importance of Being Student-Centered When Developing Partnerships. Students are the primary reason for the existence of higher education, and Black

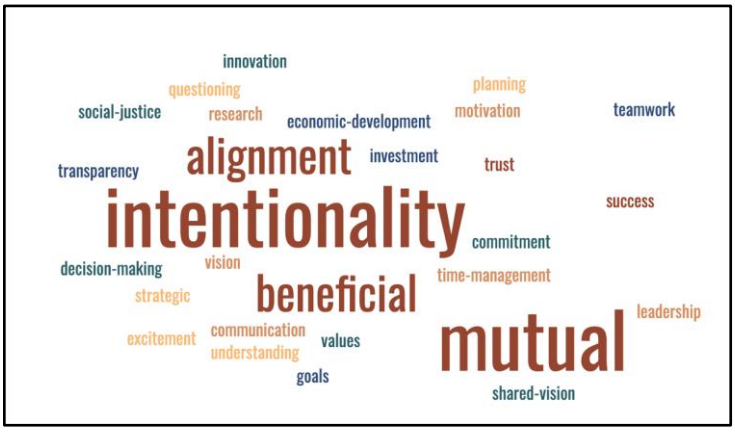
students are the primary reason HBCUs exist, therefore having student-centered partnerships is most important as a theme. Theme 1 further signifies why partnerships should directly impact students rather than solely benefiting those who secure corporate job opportunities. Some of the categories that helped shape this theme included student-centered, underrepresented, first-generation, inclusion, barriers, engagement, internship, and scholarship.

Figure 4: *Categories used to shape Theme 1*



Theme 2: Tailored Approach - Intentional Efforts Toward Establishing Mutually Beneficial Partnerships. Partnerships with corporations should resemble relationships. Theme 2 emphasizes the importance of intentionality when fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. Some of the categories that helped shape this theme included: intentionality, mutually beneficial, alignment, economic development, communication, and shared vision.

Figure 5: *Categories used to shape Theme 2*



Theme 3: Champions Initiate and Drive Corporate Partnerships. This study revealed that partnership champions are critical in the development and execution of partnerships. Some of the categories that helped shape this theme included champion, alumni, networking, community engagement, and relationship building.

Figure 6: *Categories used to shape Theme 3*

Theme 4: Perspectives of How Capacity Building Impacts Partnership Results. Theme 4 emphasizes that comprehensive corporate partnerships can significantly impact their institution's financial and human capital, thus increasing their bandwidth to better serve their students and future workforce. Some of the categories that helped shape this theme included capacity building, human resources, financial resources, turnover, challenges, and improvement.

Figure 7: *Categories used to shape Theme 4*

According to Polkinghorne (1995), "Two types of paradigmatic reporting are possible: (a) one in which the concepts are derived from theory or logic and applied to the data to find instances of the concepts; and (b) one in which concepts are inductively derived from the data" (p. 13). The results from this study were reported in the form of themes and patterns. It was critical for this study to identify patterns and themes related to the research question of the experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) who have collaborated with external corporate partners in an effort to support, develop, and enhance the institution. The identified themes and patterns contribute to the scholarly research related to this area of focus.

Informed Consent & Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at North Carolina State University. The role of the Review Board was to "protect participant welfare by reviewing research proposals that involve humans to ensure that the planned research activities are ethical in practice and compliant with the federal regulations governing research with human subjects" (Research Administration and Compliance, 2023).

A common misconception in research is that ethical issues will only occur during the data collection process; however, ethical issues can arise at any point during the study, as early as the researcher identifying participants (prior to data collection) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher anticipated ethical issues such as breach of confidentiality or confusion about the role of the researcher, and by providing a clear explanation of the study, its purpose, and measures that were taken to provide anonymity, participants were given reassurance that their information would maintain confidentiality. This information was shared with participants via consent forms, and they were asked to review and agree, then verbally acknowledge their consent prior to starting the interview, to confirm their understanding of the voluntary nature of this study, along with their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Trustworthiness & Credibility of the Study

The nature of qualitative research provides a noteworthy value; "trustworthiness criteria are pragmatic choices for researchers concerned about the acceptability and usefulness of their research for a variety of stakeholders" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 1, 3). To ensure the credibility of this study, the researcher worked with a committee of experts who conducted peer reviews of the research and met with the researcher and the study's faculty advisor to debrief feedback for improvement. Additionally, the researcher practiced member checking, which is one of the most critical practices for assessing trustworthiness (Kornbluh, 2015). Member checking provided space for participants to review and correct their words captured on the transcript, further providing evidence of ethically sourced data. Narrative inquiry approached as a qualitative research method, requires quality criteria and trustworthiness, which are confirmed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This study acknowledges credibility through member checking, transferability through the detailed descriptions of each

participant, dependability through an audit trail which ensured that the findings were directly connected to the data, and confirmability through field notes and analytic memos (memos, notes, observations) (Pino Gavidia and Adu, 2022).

Limitations & Delimitations

There were some limitations in this study. The general limitations of the study included the sample size of this study, which was limited to specific roles within HBCUs in North Carolina. The findings from this study can be transferable to other HBCUs. Additionally, relying on participant's honesty while they shared their experiences was a limitation.

Delimitations related directly to the boundaries set by the researcher included the population. While this study collected the lived experiences of HBCU leaders from the institutions in which the participants worked, it did not capture the lived experiences of all HBCU leaders. This study was limited to HBCUs, which excluded perspectives from other institutions that are not classified as HBCUs. The region for this study was limited to HBCUs that are located in North Carolina. North Carolina was chosen because it is home to over 10 HBCUs, including both public and private institutions, making it a notable concentration of HBCUs in one region (CREED, n.d.). The presence of some of the country's largest PWIs in the state was also pertinent when addressing issues related to access and financial disparities. In an ideal study, participants from all HBCUs would be represented; however, this was not feasible given the scope of this study. Since there was limited prior research on this specific topic, there was also a limitation to accessing available academic literature, which created a need for further development in the area of study. This study was time-bound, which was a limitation as well. The time in which administrative leaders had to share was limited, and the study itself was time-bound based on the researcher’s anticipated timeline. The stories shared through the narrative are

also a representation of a moment in time that reflects a distinct time period. Interviews were only conducted once with each participant, which limited the depth of information that could be collected. The researcher's personal bias as an HBCU alumni was yet another limitation of this study, which is addressed via a positionality statement in chapter five.

Reflexivity

As this study evolved, it was important to maintain a continuous method of self-reflection to identify any assumptions and to prepare for any potential consequences. Through the self-reflection process, data was acknowledged through a meaningful process and revisited frequently to construct the knowledge gained and to measure assumptions (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Bruce, et. al., 2016; Smythe & Murray, 2000; Hickson, 2016). Approaching this study with reflexivity in mind was how the researcher was able to align each story with sociality, temporality, and place, further advancing the process of deconstructing stores while identifying meaning (Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

Positionality & Reflection Statement

As a Black female alumna of an HBCU in North Carolina, where I earned my bachelor's degree, my past and current experiences shaped my perspective for this study. In my current role as a mid-level leader in the corporate space, I am deeply involved in supporting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts and advocating for the recruitment of students from HBCUs. With prior employment experiences at two PWIs and a community college, I actively engaged with corporate partners seeking connections with the institutions. At PWIs, I spearheaded professional development programs for Black and Brown students, facilitating their engagement with corporate partners. My certification as a Global Career Development Facilitator further signifies my commitment to students' career growth and success.

As a doctoral student in higher education leadership, I am committed to equity efforts for students. My assumptions for this study were grounded in personal and professional experiences, recognizing the critical need for corporate partnerships in higher education, particularly at HBCUs. Through this study, I acknowledged the challenges in establishing connections between corporations and HBCU leaders, along with the disparity in opportunities between HBCUs and PWIs. My personal bias related to this study is to leverage this research to drive positive changes within HBCUs in the future.

Choosing narrative inquiry as the method aligned with my goal of amplifying the unique stories of HBCUs, which often get generalized. Through individual narratives, I was able to highlight the diverse experiences and challenges encountered by leaders at HBCUs, emphasizing their personal journeys as champions for their institutions. The key findings presented here are intended to inspire greater partnership engagement with HBCUs. By directly connecting these findings to frameworks, I hope to empower HBCUs to formulate effective strategies for engaging with corporate partners and ensuring the sustainability of partnerships.

Chapter Summary

This study explored the lived experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) who have collaborated with external corporate partners in an effort to support, develop, and enhance their institutions. To accurately accomplish answering the guiding research question, the researcher used a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, using an in-depth interview process to capture their lived experiences and identify patterns and themes. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing tools to capture video and audio, as it allowed the researcher to study and journal through notes both verbal and nonverbal responses. Interviews were transcribed and transferred to a data analysis tool,

ATLAS.ti, where they were coded, and labels (nodes) were assigned. To ensure credibility of the transcripts, the researcher asked participants to engage in member-checking. In addition, the researcher used a committee of experts and the project's faculty advisor to identify potential biases in the conclusions drawn. Data analysis employing Polkinghorne's (1995) paradigmatic mode of analysis (analysis of narratives) was used to organize the findings into a report of common themes based upon conceptual foundations.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the unique experiences of the seven HBCU administrative leaders who participated in this study. These experiences are recounted through narratives based on interviews with the participants, which were shaped by the interview protocol. Through these narratives, the chapter offers insights into how each participant has experienced partnerships with corporations. This study was guided by the research question:

What are the lived experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) who have collaborated with external corporate partners in an effort to support, develop, and enhance their institutions?

The structure of this chapter begins by providing an overview of the demographic composition of both the institutions and participants involved in the study. It then delves into the initial findings derived from the participant's pre-screening survey results are shared and explained, followed by a description of the data analysis process that led to identifying key themes. Each key theme is explained to provide an overview of how they relate to the narratives. Following this, individual participant narratives are structured, incorporating their descriptions and interview findings related to the study's key themes. Finally, the chapter concludes with a comprehensive summary.

Demographic Makeup of Institutions

As previously noted, HBCUs in North Carolina were chosen due to their distinctive composition, which offers a representative sample of the broader HBCU community. This study included participants from both public and private HBCUs, comprised of institutions of various

sizes. Data sourced from U.S. News and World Report (2024) provided further insights into the demographic characteristics of each institution. Sixty percent of accredited HBCUs in North Carolina were included in the study. Among the schools, thirty-three percent (n=2) were private, while the remaining sixty-seven percent (n=4) were public, and state funded. Thirty-three percent (n=2) of the institutions had undergraduate enrollments of fewer than 1,000 students, fifty percent (n=3) had enrollments of fewer than 10,000 students, and the remaining seventeen percent (n=1) had enrollments exceeding 10,000 students, indicating a mix of both small and large institutions. Furthermore, seventeen percent (n=1) of the institutions were located in rural areas, while the remaining eighty-three percent (n=5) were situated in urban settings. In summary, this study encompassed a diverse range of schools, offering a representative sample relative to the broader HBCU population.

Participant Demographics & Background

The synthesized narratives incorporate specific background details about each participant. **Table 4** offers a demographic overview organized by participant pseudonyms, gender, race, and age. Forty-three percent (*n*=3) of this study's participants were female; the same is true for male participants. Fourteen percent (*n*=1) of participants chose not to disclose their gender. Additionally, all participants reported their race as Black or African American, and their ages ranged.

Table 5 provides information on the professional and educational backgrounds of each participant. Of the seven participants, fifty-seven percent (*n*=4) were first-generation college students, eighty-six percent (*n*=6) had earned a doctorate degree, and their years of professional experience ranged from a total of 8 to 29 years, with an approximate average of 18 years of experience in higher education. The participants represented a variety of leadership roles within

their institutions, and their time serving at their current place of employment ranged from one year to 24 years, with an average of approximately seven and one-half years with their current university or college.

Table 4: *Participant's self-reported demographic information.*

Participant Pseudonyms	Gender	Race	Age
Ashley	Female	Black or African American	35-44 years old
Bruce	Male	Black or African American	35-44 years old
Harvey	Male	Black or African American	55-64 years old
January	Female	Black or African American	35-44 years old
John	Male	Black or African American	45-54 years old
Karen	Female	Black or African American	25-34 years old
Sunny	Female	Black or African American	45-54 years old

Table 5: *Participant's self-reported professional and educational background.*

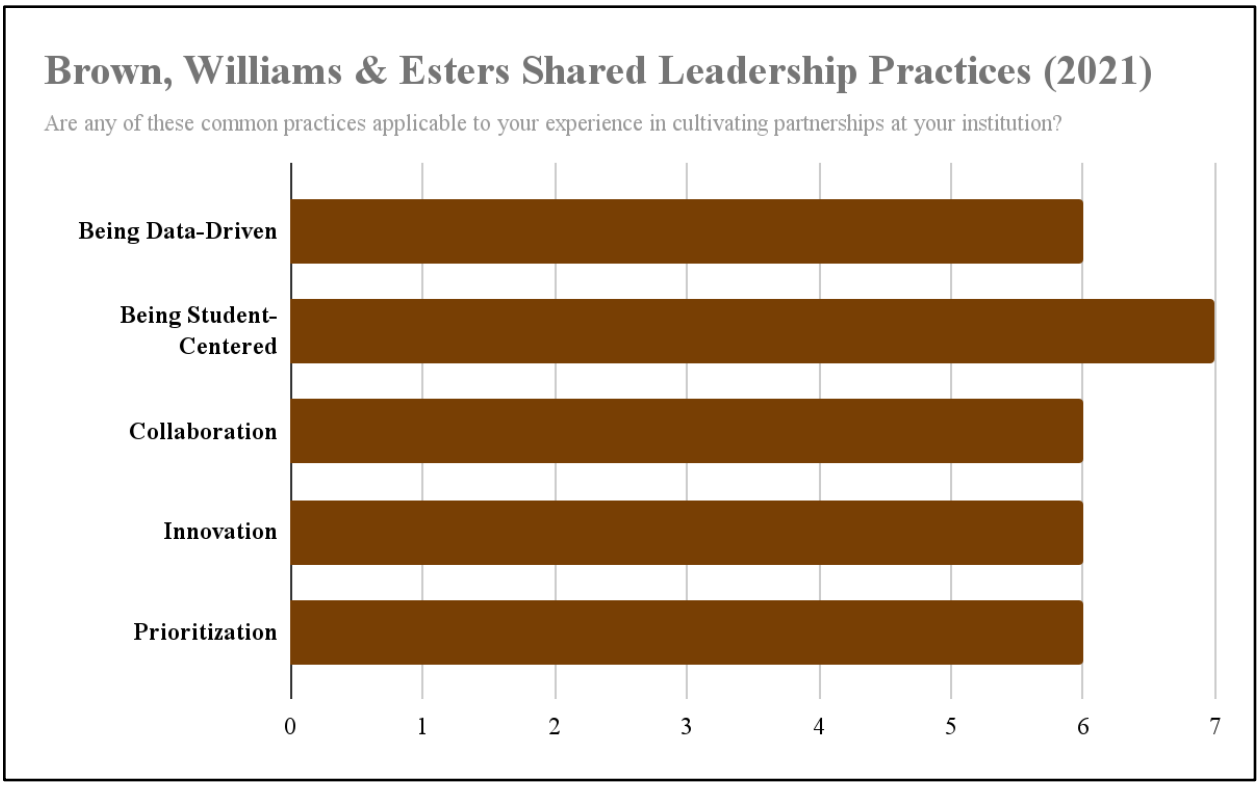
Participant Pseudonyms	First Generation College Student	Highest Education Level Achieved	Years of Professional Experience	Current Professional Role	Years Employed with Current Institution
Ashley	Yes	Doctorate	14	Executive Director	2.5
Bruce	No	Doctorate	8	Assistant Professor & Program Director	6
Harvey	Yes	Doctorate	24	Director	24
January	No	Doctorate	20	Vice President	10
John	Yes	Masters	29	Vice Chancellor	1
Karen	Yes	Doctorate	9	Department Chair & Associate Professor	7
Sunny	No	Doctorate	24	Vice President	2.5

Participant Pre-Screening Responses to Conceptual Frameworks

In the pre-screening survey, participants were asked to identify common practices and characteristics relevant to their experiences in cultivating partnerships. Figures 8 and 9 present a breakdown of participant responses to both sets of survey questions. In the first question, aligned with Brown, Williams, and Esters' Shared Leadership Practices, all participants (n=7) unanimously agreed on the significance of being student-centered in partnership formation. While responses varied for other practices, eighty-six percent (n=6) of participants affirmed the

importance of practices such as being data-driven, fostering collaboration, prioritizing innovation, and emphasizing collaboration in their partnership experiences.

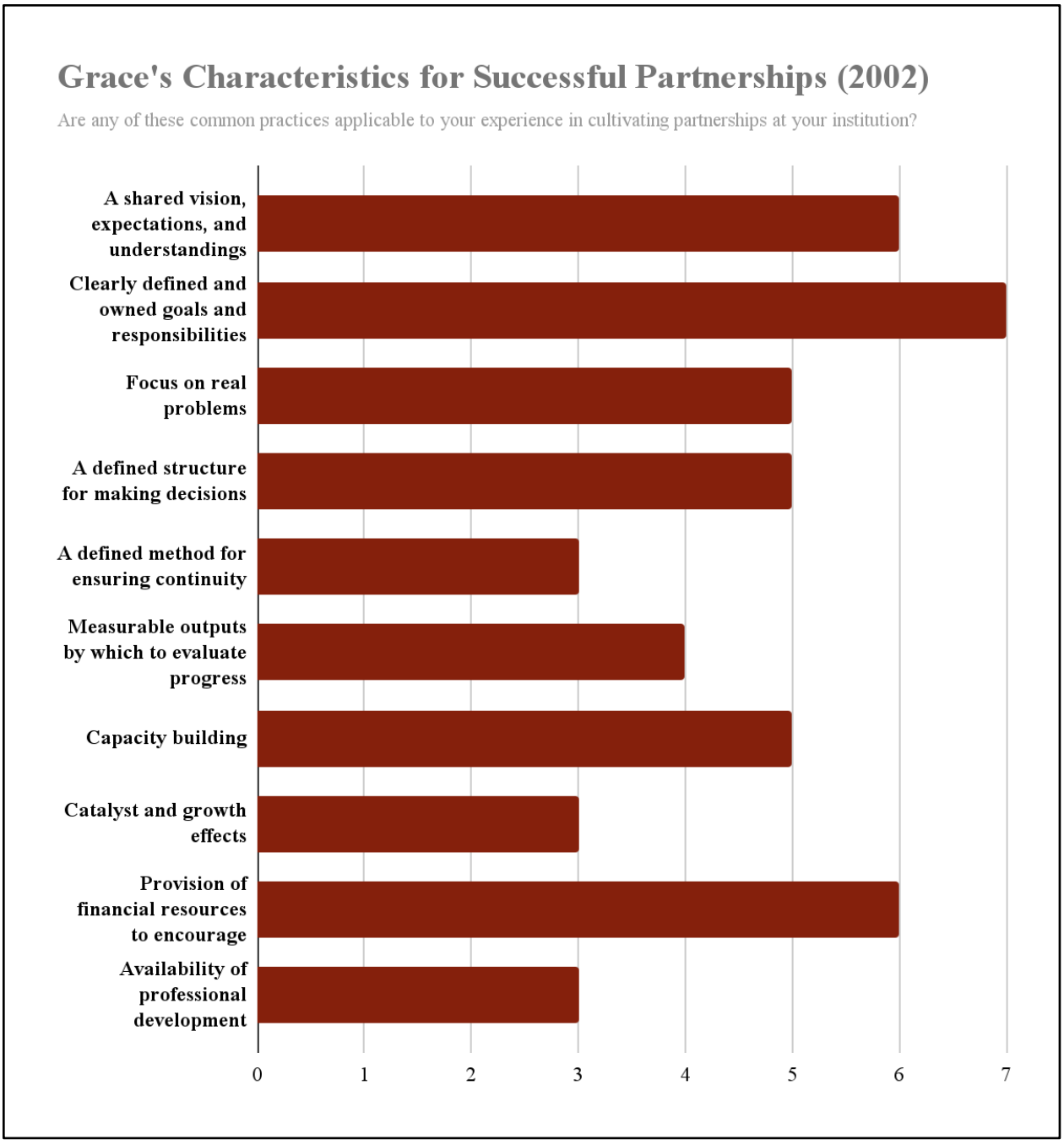
Figure 8: *A summary of participants' responses regarding Brown, Williams & Ester's Shared Leadership Practices*



In the second question, reflecting Grace's Successful Partnership Characteristics, all participants (n=7) agreed on the necessity of partnerships having clearly defined goals and responsibilities. Additionally, eighty-six percent (n=6) highlighted the importance of shared vision and expectations among partners, along with the provision of financial resources to sustain partnerships. Seventy-one percent (n=5) emphasized the importance of partnerships addressing real problems, having structured decision-making processes, and contributing to capacity building. Fifty-seven percent (n=4) identified measurable outputs as crucial for assessing progress in partnerships. Other characteristics, such as continuity, catalyst and growth effects,

and availability of professional development, were selected by forty-three percent (n=3) of participants. These findings, explored further in the subsequent themes and narratives, provide valuable insights into participants' perspectives on partnership cultivation.

Figure 9: *A summary of participants' responses regarding Grace's Characteristics for Successful Partnership*



Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were uploaded to ATLAS.ti, where the software generated codes for key terms across all interviews. Access to ATLAS.ti was password protected to ensure secure organization of interview data. Triangulation, a method employed to enhance data reliability and trustworthiness, included member checking, review of field notes, and documentation of interview observations. Pre-screening survey responses informed interview discussions, aligning with the protocol questions. Data analysis incorporated connections to conceptual frameworks, employing narrative and paradigmatic analysis techniques. Narrative analysis synthesized individual participant stories, while paradigmatic analysis identified overarching themes and patterns. These themes and patterns were crucial for understanding the experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year HBCUs collaborating with external corporate partners, contributing to scholarly research in this field.

Themes

This study identified several key themes regarding partnership development within the context of HBCUs. The key themes included the ***importance of being student-centered when developing partnerships***, taking a ***tailored approach by making intentional efforts towards establishing mutually beneficial partnerships***, the ***impact of champions who drive partnership initiatives***, and how ***capacity building impacts partnership results***. Firstly, the importance of being student-centered emerged prominently, emphasizing initiatives such as scholarships, faculty engagement opportunities, and curriculum development aimed at enhancing student outcomes. Secondly, a tailored approach to partnerships was highlighted, stressing the need for intentional efforts to establish mutually beneficial relationships, rather than transactional

arrangements. Participants emphasized the significance of aligning goals and expectations, as well as recognizing the uniqueness of each institution. Thirdly, champions played a crucial role in driving corporate partnerships, particularly alumni who leveraged their networks to create opportunities for student advancement. These champions demonstrated a deep passion for their institutions and students. Lastly, the theme of capacity building underscored the challenges faced by HBCUs in overcoming historical barriers to partnership. Participants voiced ongoing struggles in navigating these barriers, highlighting the need for concerted efforts to build institutional capacity and foster successful partnerships.

Participant Narratives

Ashley

The narrative below is a synthesis of Ashley's interview conversation, capturing her lived experiences. Direct quotes from the interview were analyzed and integrated into the narrative to maintain Ashley's natural linguistic style and perspective.

Ashley, a first-generation graduate with a doctorate, embarked on her career journey 14 years ago, gaining valuable experience at predominantly White institutions along the way. More than two years ago, she made the transition to her current employer, where she assumed the role of executive director. Reflecting on her decision to transition to an HBCU, Ashley shared:

> [I] wanted the experience to directly impact students that looked like me. And so working at PWIs in the past, obviously, I've had interactions with underserved minorities and student populations; however, it was an opportunity for me to not only interact with these students better understand what they need, but [to] be able to be in a place to actually make some decisions that directly impact their futures.

When addressing why she specifically chose to work at her employing institution, she shared:

> I saw this as a way to build something from scratch, but then also looking at it from [an] accreditation standpoint and thinking about my trajectory and working in higher education. I saw it as a way to kind of really see what it's like to infiltrate, you know, the classroom impact curriculum, so it was bigger than just working with students directly.

Theme 1: The Importance of Being Student-Centered When Developing Partnerships

Throughout my conversation with Ashley, one thing became evident: her unwavering dedication to serving students and prioritizing their well-being. Through sharing her experiences, she highlighted the unique qualities of HBCU students and emphasized the importance of understanding their backgrounds and circumstances when fostering partnerships.

> [The] majority of our students are coming from very rural counties. Before I can get a student to think about an internship, their first thing is where am I going to live? I don't have a car. Their current reality is where am I going to live over the summer because the reason why I'm in school is because I need a place to live. When I have partners that I'm talking to, I always ask about, like, housing. Are you able to offer, like, a relocation, you know, like a bonus or a signing bonus or things of that nature? Another thing that we've seen [is that] we've had students that have had to fly places they have never flown before. I'm like, now I see why you are so hesitant to go to Atlanta. You have never been in a large metropolitan area. That's a big challenge when engaging with corporate partners because a lot of them tend to be in large metropolitan areas that are over three hours away from us. And so, really, selling the students on this is going to be an awesome opportunity. It's hard because they've never left home. They've never been on a plane.

> They've never been that far away. And so, while [a student] would love to have this opportunity, there are certain barriers that are presented.

Some companies may overlook the lived experiences of students, particularly when seeking diverse candidates for internship roles. While it's not solely the corporate partner's duty to address this, recognizing the unique qualities of these students is important. Ashley noted that the institution consistently strives to support students by establishing funds and setting up a food pantry to address issues like food insecurity on campus, ensuring these barriers don't limit students' access to job opportunities.

> "We're here to [serve] students. So, when we look at some internships, some are paid $15 an hour. A student can work [in fast food] and make that. And so sometimes we have a hard sell of [students] seeing the value of getting this real-world, you know, major-related or industry-related experience because you're paying the same as a student that can go back and be a summer counselor. So, from a student perspective, it's them seeing the value in that. And so, if your partnership isn't benefiting the students, if you're not finding ways to support our students, I'm just going to question what your intent is because our whole purpose is to support students and their needs."

One example that Ashley provided was a healthcare industry partner who had "an internship program with us, but now they work with Student Health Services to provide, you know, some telemedicine support to our students and to our faculty and staff."

The "Gold Standard" Partner. When asked about corporate partners who have successfully adopted a student-centered approach, Ashley called out several that stood out because of their commitment to placing students at the forefront of their partnership engagement. "[A Tech company] worked out with another university, that is not an HBCU, for housing for

[our] students." Ashley beams with confidence as she discusses this partnership, providing evidence of the sense of trust that existed with this corporate partner. "When my students go there, they will have housing and when they come back to university, they're able to still have their housing at our university. [In addition, we] worked with the faculty members to make sure that they're able to take classes remotely." Intrigued by this partnership, Ashley elaborated on the details of this partnership:

> They do a really great job of having a holistic experience they actually do, like volunteerism, and they do different activities with the students. And so, they do a really good job of kind of enhancing the internship program. So, it's not just like, hey, we're going to bring you up to DC. You're going to do this work for 40 hours a week, and then that's it, and you figure things out by yourself. They're very much intentional about, like, assigning a mentor and really kind of understanding what the student wants to do based upon, you know, their interests.

Ashley proceeded to share how the partnership has showcased success, all while continuing to prioritize students:

> The goal [of this Tech partnership], honestly, is to develop a talent pipeline [and] since I've been there, every single student that has gotten through the process has received a job offer. A [student] that was two years out is currently working there now, and I think, has been promoted twice. [At the end of the program cycle], they bring back all their partners to their headquarters for you to see, like the final presentations of students. You can see the impact, and you can see that it's not just about talk; the students were ingrained and made these developments. [Additionally,] all of the [students] that they had [in] fall 2023, all in their [feedback] said, "My goal is to either work or intern again with the same

company.” That speaks volumes. You can tell that they are dedicated to making sure that they see the value in bringing in students from smaller HBCUs. And so that's definitely one that, to me, has set the gold standard.

Tracking Student Success. Of course, there are various methods to gauge the success of a partnership with both qualitative and quantitative indicators. The exchange of feedback with partners is crucial for determining whether students are fulfilling the expectations set by corporate partners. Ashley shared:

> Some corporate partners are really intentional about circling back with us. So, we have an end-of-year meeting. Our first destination survey [tells us] if they’ve hired any students for internships or full-time jobs. Many different ways to measure the success of a partnership, including both qualitative and quantitative markers. Giving and receiving feedback from partners is important to understand if students are meeting [the] expectations of corporate partners. We can talk about how many times that they've engaged on campus. Like has that increased? Has it not? Do they find it helpful? And if they don't find it helpful, what is the reason why, and what we can do to fix it? [We ask] Can you tell us how many students have applied [for opportunities]? Has anybody made it through a first round? Because then also, that data helps me understand what we're not doing to prepare our students. If our students are not meeting the mark, you know, meeting your expectations, [we discuss] what can we do on our side to actually help.

Theme 2: Tailored Approach - Intentional Efforts Toward Establishing Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

Ashley has years of experience collaborating with corporations during her tenure in higher education and has encountered several different engagements. One thing that remains most important is having a clear and shared vision of every partnership. Ashley shared:

> I have come across corporations that are saying diversity is important to me; I always question what that means. Are your intentions of engaging with [us] just to diversify your applicant pool? So, when I'm having these conversations, that's something that I talk about upfront, like, what exactly are you looking for? Are you looking to really build a partnership? And then also, I kind of challenge them, like, why is this partnership important to you? Because now we're going to see, you know, is there a shared vision? That's why the shared vision is important, because you can talk about, oh, you know, DEI is so important, but where's your money going? And so, outside of coming to the career fair, have you supported any other initiatives of the university? That tells me a lot about what your vision is and your understanding.

Being intentional about partnering with her HBCU mattered more to her than the various things that a corporate partner may bring to the table, and as Ashley emphasized, this intentionality can look different ways:

> Understanding it’s not cookie cutter. You can't do the same thing at our university that you do at the others. You want to know the time that [partners are] willing to invest. [Partners] really have to be committed to the vision of our chancellor and our university [and] understand that it may take some time for, you know, for it to gain traction.”

Building Long-Lasting Relationships. When interviewing for the role "my Vice Chancellor said that they needed someone in this role that realizes that every opportunity is not the opportunity that [the university] need[s] to engage in. That's been my focus, of actually building long-lasting partnerships that you see at normally larger HBCUs and definitely at PWIs." Consistent with the work of Gasman & Esters (2024), the interview with Ashley presented the spark when corporations want to partner with HBCUs, many who simply throw money at these institutions, including Ashley's: "I think sometimes [schools] get excited about, oh, you know, we got this large lump sum of money, but then there's no goals… like, are you using this to fund a new program? Are you using it for scholarships? There has to be actual goals. And if you are using it to develop a new program [or] an internship program because you're starting from scratch, what are the goals? Who's owning it? Are you [the corporation] taking ownership?

Alignment of Values and Expectations. A major part of being intentional is aligning on what is feasible for a partnership. Ashley shared:

> One of the things that I share early on is we have a factbook of our university that breaks down the number of students in each major. And so, I like to lead with that because if you're a company, you're only coming to recruit [a certain major], I can tell you right now I have less than 30 [students in that program]. And so, if you're coming, thinking that you're going to fill [your open roles] along with all 20 other [organizations] that are coming to recruit, you're only going to be able to hire five [students]... because we don't have that many students. Or we do have, like, a new [innovative] program. There's only five majors, like legitimately five majors. So… managing expectations is key.

Once clear expectations are set, it's important to manage them and determine ways to measure success and impact. Ashley stated:

> I feel like sometimes that's the message that gets lost in translation is like, how exactly are we measuring success? What do you need, what are you looking to gain because that really kind of helps drive you know, that relationship. Especially for a small, you know, HBCU like us… there's a chance that you may not see, you know, that instant [ROI] that first semester. Or maybe that first semester you meet all your goals, but then the next semester, you don't… you need to really determine what exactly you're looking for.

When plans are out of alignment, the respective parties should come to the table to revise the strategy. Ashley shared an example of this: "I asked [the partner] how can we, kind of, revise, you know, our strategy [for] one internship program that we do have. I made a recommendation about changing the application process because it didn't work for our students."

Ideal Partnership. When considering the characteristics of an ideal partnership, Ashley emphasized that having a shared vision is essential.

> An ideal partnership would first kind of start with, kind of like, a shared vision and goals and expectations as far as what's going to come out of the partnership. So, it's very clear about, you know, what their expectations are and meets ours. More than just coming to the career fair and sending us your link for the application. Like it's actually, you know, [do] you actually get to know the students? [Are you] open to come onto campus multiple times, both virtual and in person? Engaging with our leadership because I think that's important. Engaging with faculty members, like are you interested in funding research with the faculty members? But really, it's just that intentionality behind it like we can tell that we're a priority. And then that for it, like we feel that it helps us pull together all the

> bandwidth we can to make you a priority as well because we can see you know, that is something that you really want."

Lived Experiences with Partners. Many of the ideal characteristics that Ashley shared are being realized in current partnerships. The University's partnership with a financial institution's foundation is a good example:

> I feel like the success comes when we keep getting awarded. Because we have to do a final report and we have to basically justify how all the funds were used. We have to provide, like, you know, information about you know, just how the students do and that comes from the student evaluation of the internship site, and it comes from the employer evaluation of the internship site. So, if you don't prove that there is benefit to your students, there's a chance that you will not receive the funding again.

In addition, when referring to the 'gold standard' partner, Ashley said:

> They did a pilot program with HBCUs… but they wanted to actually focus on [us,] smaller HBCUs. [The company] is not a large name… most students wouldn't necessarily know about it. So, a lot of this was them trying to strategize for brand awareness. The reason why I highlight this one is the intentionality, like, they took the time to come to the university, to visit the campus, to meet the students, [and] to engage with different levels of leadership and administration. They have initiated faculty breakfasts, they have initiated luncheons, they have come to the career fairs they have been involved with athletics. So, they have found different ways to get more involved in different areas of the university. [As it relates to their overall goal] I think the success is really, you know, that internship to full-time conversion rate. Sometimes they honestly see the benefit, like, they

> get excited to just know that they have the ability to offer, like, full-time positions to some of the students, even if they decide, you know, not to accept it.

Theme 3: Champions Initiate and Drive Corporate Partnerships

Alumni and Black Greek Letter Organizations. While Ashley's institution may be small in size, their network remains strong because of various partnership advocates.

> I think what comes up a lot, working at HBCUs, is that corporate partners will work with the university because they know of somebody that works there [or] there's a connection because an alum works [at the corporation]. So, the alumni [are] very strong. And so, when they move to different places, they normally will try and reach back and say "Hey, I know about this, can we come back?" From my experience a lot of the partnerships [also happen] when you bring in [Black] Greek letter organizations. There's a tie there because oh, we're in the same fraternity or sorority, so now I've committed.

Additional Partnership Sources. Senior leadership also played an important role in partnership development; Ashley stated, "with [the Tech company] my previous Vice Chancellor… engaged with them from an advancement standpoint, and so he actually met with them. [For another partnership] that's the foundation [leadership], and so their relationship is either 10 or 15 years old." Additionally, numerous corporate partners are drawn to her institution due to its distinctive program offerings.

Driving Partnerships. Although initiating partnerships requires significant efforts from champions, managing them on a daily basis demands even more work to guarantee a positive experience for the corporate partner, along with ensuring that the partnership goals are fulfilled. Ashley and her team not only work to establish partnerships but are also responsible for the day-to-day operations:

> I'm the lead on [them] but my assistant director really provides, like, the oversight. So, like if a decision needs to be made, it comes to me, but outside of that, like the day-to-day and kind of follow-up with students and overall engagements, that's the assistant director. [With some partnerships] we do most of the legwork.

Theme 4: Perspectives of How Capacity Building Impacts Partnership Results

Upon joining her institution, Ashley experienced the frustration of managing turnover and witnessing her institution's prioritization of roles. She explained:

> I think just in general, in higher education, the turnover rate is high. And so, retention is obviously an issue. And so especially when you have a small university. Since I've been at the institution… I have had three assistant directors. [Prior to my arrival] there was literally only one person [running the department]. For me that spoke volumes of where [the institution] saw value. Sometimes it is frustrating because of all the different responsibilities that you have. So, if I make any purchases with my [purchasing] card, I'm the one that has to reconcile it. If I need to get a contract signed for someone… I'm the one that has to initiate that. If I am, you know, getting a charter bus… I'm doing that. I have to, you know, do all those things. It becomes harder to really kind of give attention to partnerships that you would like to, because you're faced with managing multiple roles, but especially like with us, we legitimately do not have an administrative assistant [role].

When referring to one of their large foundation-based partnerships, Ashley shared: "I write the grants, I'm listed as the [principal investigator] on them. Writing these grants and managing these partnerships is not [my] only responsibility."

Challenges with Institutional Memory & Structure. Naturally, high turnover can result in the loss of crucial institutional memory, as well as relationships, as individuals leave the university. Ashley stated:

> I've had instances where people take some information with them. And so now, you know, even though we used to have a contact, now we don't, so now we have to try and find a new one. So, when you think about it, long-term, that really impacts your relationship with corporate partners because they started out working with this one person, then when that person leaves, there's a lag time between getting the second person now you have to introduce that person. From the institution standpoint, I've seen there's been a lot of moving parts and a lot of people leaving university, [and] coming to the university, which takes away from institutional knowledge. [To make matters worse] a lot of departments work in silos. Some corporate partners specifically work [a] department and that department only, and so they house and keep that information from [others].

The absence of established systems to retain information or procedures further complicates the management of external relationships. Ashley shared her frustrations:

> When I'm coming into a role where there was only one person, I didn't inherit anything and so there was no, there wasn't a real structure. There was no outline of how you would engage with [corporate partners]. I'm still, like, building it now. I not only had to come in and build a whole team and build rapport and build trust but then build structure and like a process that didn't exist. [When] the systems are not in order, and there's no infrastructure, that really impacts your ability to do your job. I haven't had an opportunity to have a full year to really do those check-ins [with partners] like I would like to.

Limited Bandwidth and Follow-through. Working at a smaller HBCU, Ashley deals with the challenge of limited institutional bandwidth, including the realization of how it impacts her ability to maintain relationships with external corporate partners. She detailed various ways that she navigates these challenges daily at her institution:

> I just don't have the bandwidth. Even though we're a small university, just the amount of hats that we have to wear makes it very difficult to maintain all of these relationships. [It's hard enough] because we're small… we normally kind of get pushed to the side and people don't consider us. And so, while pilot programs are really really important, sometimes the expectations that [partners] have, we can't deliver on. And so, it's still, it's like, you're giving us an opportunity, but we can't follow through on it because of what you're asking us to do."

Solutioning. When asked about what solutions could help overcome these challenges, Ashley had ideas that led back to the key theme of partnerships being intentional and mutually beneficial. Ashley shared:

> It's really a matter of kind of extending grace and understanding like there are so many nuances within the HBCU realm that [even] I did not know of until I got here; and "[if] I [ever] decide to leave the university, in order for those [corporate partnerships] to continue, you have to have some type of structure on how you make decisions and how you move and how you operate.

When offering advice to corporate partners on managing capacity building with her institution, Ashley shared a few things to consider:

> Do you [the corporation] have the team to support [partnership] efforts for our university, understanding that it's going to be more than just posting a job… or coming to an event?

> Do you really have what it takes to give us the resources that we need if you want to make this work for us? [Partners are] gonna have to be a little bit more intentional.

What is Ashley's Lived Experience with Corporate Partners?

Ashley highlighted her dedication to student success and institutional advancement throughout her shared experience. Ashley's interview tells us about the importance of being student-centered when developing partnerships while educating us on the unique challenges faced by HBCU students and the need to understand their backgrounds. Through her story, we learn about the power of alumni networks and Black Greek Letter Organizations and the impactful role they play in forging connections with her institution. One of the key takeaways from her lived experience is the challenges that are faced at HBCUs, particularly around limited bandwidth. She acknowledges the strain it can pose on fostering new partnerships, but she stands firm in ensuring that if she is going to make the time for a corporate partner, they should be committed to fostering meaningful partnerships that prioritize student success and institutional growth.

Bruce

The narrative below is a synthesis of Bruce's interview conversation, capturing his lived experience. Direct quotes from the interview were analyzed and integrated into the narrative to maintain Bruce's natural linguistic style and perspective.

Bruce, an undergraduate alumnus at his employing institution, had eight years of professional experience and has dedicated six years to his current position as an Assistant Professor and Program Director. While he earned his doctorate from a PWI, he posited that he

"felt like I had some things to offer, coming back to an HBCU. So, I think I had a lot of value to bring to the students here and a lot of resources that I had picked up along the way, as I, you know, went through graduate school." However, like many dedicated HBCU leaders, Bruce juggles numerous responsibilities beyond his designated role, stating, "the hats that I wear… [and] things that I do that are not even a part of why they pay me…" including his role as a grant seeker, writer and program manager.

Theme 1: The Importance of Being Student-Centered When Developing Partnerships

As an alumnus of his institution, Bruce recognized the significance and influence that partnerships can have on students, especially when shaping their career and life paths. "The focus of partnerships, for me, is to help the students [at my university]." When evaluating partnerships, Bruce prioritizes ensuring that they "provide opportunities for our students, or funding in some way for our university." As a faculty member, he actively seeks partnerships that facilitate student learning and development. He particularly appreciated partnerships that incorporate field experiences, as they "[help] them learn the principles, the concepts, the fundamentals" of leading industries.

An 'Oprah-like' Experience. He elaborated on his experience working with various corporate partners and stressed the importance of programs that can have enduring effects on students, particularly when they address their unique needs. One specific example he recalled was a STEM-based partnership:

> The goal of that was to increase [the] science capital of students. [During the program] they got paid, and then [gained] experience as well. Students in the [program] got a $400 stipend for the week. At the end of [the program], I was like, Oprah, like "Hey, and those iPads we use during the camp, you guys get to keep them." [This was significant

> because] students that are in the [program are] from underrepresented groups, and they may not have access to technologies like this, so [we took] that barrier off the table.

He went on further to share how the partnership, though only lasting a week, offered them valuable work experience. “So, when they get ready to apply to go to [our] university or any other HBCU, or any other schools in the nation, they have that to put on their resume.” More importantly, the exposure itself had an impact by:

> Sparking [their] interest, whether they like science or not. Ultimately, it's about [whether we] can incite anything that will push them to either go towards science or to show that they don't like it.

Theme 2: Tailored Approach - Intentional Efforts Toward Establishing Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

Clear Expectations and Guidelines. As a professor responsible for crafting and enforcing course syllabi each semester, Bruce recognizes the significance of establishing clear expectations and guidelines. He applies these same principles when entering into external partnerships. Bruce reflected:

> Before I embark on [a] corporate partnership or relationship with another entity, [it’s important] that they are on the same wavelength as me, as far as, like, what the expectations are, and what we want from them as far as what we have to offer, but sort of there's a mutually beneficial partnership.

He went on to state that “roles are usually defined based on the partnership structure… because the roles come with tasks usually.” When asked about how the structure is agreed upon, Bruce shared his experience at initial partnership meetings:

> The first meeting may be a discussion of like, what I would like to do, what I would like to see happen in the partnership, and vice versa for them what they want to get out of it. Then we find a common ground there. And then once we get to the common ground, we can see if we think this is going to be beneficial for both parties. Then we can then plan out or move into the next thing of, like, defining the roles.

Working with Grants. There are some instances where the terms of the partnership are predefined, especially when managing grant programs. “The grant plays an important role because it's kind of like the blueprint… it's like a contract in a way.” This is important because expectations can be clear both ways “just as much so that as they can hold me accountable for the things that I said I wanted to do, I can do the same thing. [The grant] is just a document to kind of hold everybody accountable. And so, you don't forget what you said that you were going to do.”

Measuring Impact. Certainly, in every partnership, establishing measurable outcomes is important to ensure that the expectations of the partnership are being fulfilled. Regarding the assessment of impact, Bruce mentioned:

> [In most partnerships] we do have some outcomes and objectives that we can, kind of, measure. And so, we might have surveys that are tied to that. We have an assessment to see if we're actually hitting that goal, or [if] we're doing better. And some of those assessments are either done by me, or it can be an internal evaluator, or we'll pay for an external evaluator to be non-biased.

To echo the importance of measuring impact, he tied in the importance of open communication, “[Additionally, in] the annual report… I tell them what I did, they give me feedback… [on] what else can we do to be helpful for [the partner] to make sure that [the partnership] is efficient. If I

needed any help or whatever, then I can ask, and I can give feedback to them. The feedback is usually like a two-way street."

Leading with Good Intentions. While clear structure is essential, Bruce emphasized that a partnership driven by good intentions is even more important to him. This was particularly meaningful for Bruce, given his experiences as both an HBCU and PWI graduate. In his words:

> One thing to ensure [is] that the corporate partner that we're working with… [has] some skin in the game as well, so they're not just, you know, trying to take advantage of [our HBCU] or the specific demographic of people that we have. [Companies] will say on their outreach, or whatever, some DEIA statement that they want to work with [HBCUs], [it's important that the partnership is] not like something that's parasitic in which [the company] is using our students to push their agenda or just highlight and showcase or have a token.

Additionally, Bruce shared that being intentional includes corporate partners getting to know the champion who is leading the partnership. "I think the ideal partnership… [requires] the partner to take some time to get to know the five-star recruit that is conducting [the partnership]."

Partnership Example. Bruce detailed an example of a well-intentioned and structured partnership with a large corporate foundation. "I have this partnership with [a large corporate] foundation. In that partnership, I get, like, a grant through their agency to do a [program] at [my] university. [This grant] is an investment in good faith that it will have an impact [because the work] is a part of their mission." He continued on about the trust he has established with this partner by having open lines of communication:

> At no point have I felt left behind or that they're not supporting me throughout the duration of the grant. Like if I need to call them, if I need to email them, if I need to get

> in contact with them, they are there to give me any support [and] any help that I need. And that is a very welcoming and reassuring type of feeling. To have that support in the back corner is very, very helpful for me, to push me to continue to do whatever cool and great things that I want to do.

Theme 3: Champions Initiate and Drive Corporate Partnerships

Bruce's status as an alumnus of his current institution serves as a significant motivator for his role as a champion for corporate partnerships. "For me personally, it's all about just helping others and providing opportunities for others." Champions can drive partnerships at institutions, and Bruce acknowledges the importance of having a team of peers to lead in the partnership development space: "We definitely have a group of other champions, and so by no means am I the only member of the Justice League over here." As a leader who is representing the institution with external partners, he shared: "I think the university and the main player at the university, that relationship has to be important and substantial." He went on to talk about how leadership will reach out to you when you are trusted as a program champion. Such was the case with the institution's partnership with the large corporate foundation "My dean said 'Oh, Bruce, I think this might be something cool you might be interested in, and she sent it to me [to follow through on].

Naturally, reflecting on his current experience compared to his previous tenure at a PWI, Bruce used the analogy of being on a boat, trying to secure and work with a corporate partner. "If I'm Bruce at a PWI, I'm already on a Yacht. [At a PWI], they have a team of people with nets to help you pull the fish out. They already have a feeder pool of fish that you can just go practice fishing and pull them in."

When overseeing partnerships, Bruce described himself as “hands-on.” This approach involves taking responsibility for the quality of relationships and interactions between corporate partners and the institution. Establishing a reputation of trustworthiness was crucial for him as a champion. Bruce explained:

> I want things that I do or that I'm associated with - if students see my name associated with it, they know that is beneficial for them. They know it is going to be cool and innovative and fun. And it's going to be, in general, just something cool to do and that they know… wouldn't waste my time or their time.

He leverages his experience as an alum to ensure he is sending the right “messaging and imagery [because] I know how it was.” He went on to say, “[It’s important to] show them that, you know, even though you come from [an HBCU], you can still go and be amazing and do great things. And I'm a product, and other [champions] are products as well.”

As a trusted partnership champion, Bruce needs to maintain a strong partnership network. When asked about how he does this, he shared:

> If [an HBCU] doesn’t have a Bruce at that university, or they don't have a five-star recruit there, or somebody that's going to go and get it done regardless, it's harder for the corporations to see or identify like this place being a place to invest. If I can show that we've had a relationship or something already, then [another partner] will say “Oh, I believe in that because I've already seen that you guys are working [with another partner]. [Ultimately,] what I do know now is I have experience and so the next partnership I go into, I know what to maybe ask for what I'm looking for a little bit better, so I'm a little bit more efficient in that next relationship.

Theme 4: Perspectives of How Capacity Building Impacts Partnership Results

Having encountered an abundance of resources during his graduate program at a PWI, Bruce observes and feels the scarcity of resources present at HBCUs, especially at his institution. "HBCUs are at a deficit of resources, personnel, opportunities, you name it." As an enthusiast of analogies, Bruce further illustrated his experiences by comparing them to a food retail corporation, working with farmers to source produce for their business.

> [Suppose] with local farmers, they have farmland, but they don't know how to grow [and] the crop is not coming in good. Versus, like, some GMO farm, that is, like, just putting out products all the time. So, it's easier just to go get strawberries from them. Versus the local down-home farmer that you know, that has a drainage or irrigation issue. And so, HBCUs in general… have a lot of infrastructure, things that they're lacking, and resources that they need.

When referring directly to his PWI alma mater, Bruce shared:

> They're literally like a machine, and they have years [upon] years of resources, [and] infrastructure. They have all the new cutting-edge stuff that's coming in every day and so like, it's just easier for corporations to plug in there because they already got the machine rolling. Corporations will view the top-notch facilities first just because "hey, you guys like you got it going on."

Managing Deficits. As a part of this deficit, Bruce, like many others, must take on various roles to achieve daily tasks and fulfill commitments with corporate partners. According to Bruce:

> Partnerships are very hard to do… as an individual. Establishing things and getting them off the ground… takes a lot of time and effort. That's not the only thing that a faculty

> member at an HBCU does. I do a lot of stuff. A lot of people do a lot of stuff. And so, all the hats that I wear or, you know, things that I do, that are not even a part of why they pay me right. You don't want to [risk] getting too overworked.

In reference to how the institution can better support champions like Bruce, he shared:

> If the university gets better at assisting whoever that five-star recruit is and getting that partnership or assisting with that, taking some of the work off of that person, then it's more time for me to go do other things. [In an ideal situation] the university as a whole actually helps in assisting that person beyond the partnership.

"Sometimes it can be very frustrating," Bruce shared. Yet, despite experiencing a deficit in resources daily, he still manages to make things work when engaging with corporate partners. As he put it:

> [At] HBCUs, in general, you do have those, kind of, five-star players that are just like putting in work, getting 20 and 10 every night. I'm saying, can't nobody really stop me… [and] there's other players that are, you know, all-star caliber as well, but the number may be less and because of, you know, the lack of resources. Sometimes… people will look at you like, why are you guys using those resources to do little things? I'm like these [are] all the resources I got, right? So, I gotta work with what I have. We can still take the lesser than and still make a five-star meal that's delicious. If I were to get resources, just imagine how impactful we could be.

What is Bruce's Lived Experience with Corporate Partners?

Bruce's journey as an alumnus turned Assistant Professor and Program Director at his alma mater is signified by his relentless dedication to student success and institutional advancement. Despite the challenges of juggling multiple roles and navigating resource

constraints, Bruce continues to be committed to fostering impactful partnerships that directly benefit his students and future students at his institution. Throughout his shared experience, we can see his belief in the transformative power that corporate partnerships can have on shaping students' academic and professional journeys. As a 'five-star recruit,' he continuously advocates for partnerships that are driven by good intentions. He continuously earns his 'five stars' by ensuring that those partnerships have clear expectations, are mutually beneficial, and have transparent communication.

Harvey

The narrative below is a synthesis of Harvey's interview conversation, capturing his lived experience. Direct quotes from the interview were analyzed and integrated into the narrative to maintain Harvey's natural linguistic style and perspective.

Harvey serves as a director at his employing institution, bringing with him 24 years of professional experience engaging within his local community. Reflecting on his network, he noted, "I'm well connected… [which makes] things a lot simpler for me to be able to connect with people." As a first-generation graduate and an alumnus of his institution, he cherishes "the educational attainment that I received there," to the extent that he pursued a doctoral degree as a continuation of that commitment.

Theme 1: The Importance of Being Student-Centered When Developing Partnerships

Harvey, working at an institution where over a quarter of the student body is comprised of first-generation college students, must prioritize student-centered and focused partnership engagements. When explaining the makeup of his institution's student body he stated:

> Many students who go to [our] HBCU are first-time college students, and they come from varying backgrounds. They come from rural backgrounds, they come from backgrounds where they may not have been exposed to a whole lot. Their socioeconomic differences are very different than freshmen from [PWI] institutions. Their struggles might be a whole lot different than some of these other [students].

Adjusting to Corporate. During discussions with corporate partners, Harvey expressed that "every opportunity that we have with a corporate company should be student-centered because… the whole purpose of higher education is simply our students. [Partnerships should] have an approach that addresses student needs and student desires and outcomes." This is especially important as students try to adjust to connecting and working with corporations.

> "Particularly with internships, [corporations] want to be able to give students an experience to work in the corporate setting. [However] it can be extremely difficult for them to sometimes survive in those kinds of environments. It's not to say they're not intelligent or don't know, [just that] their exposure might be somewhat different."

Student Feedback Matters. When addressing how partners can prioritize student-centric success measurement, Harvey mentioned: "The students' feedback is critical. It really helps to hear firsthand what went well, what needed some more work to it, what did [the partner] not help [them] really achieve… [this information is] really essential in this process. You got to hear their voice." To clarify his focus on students, and avoid misinterpretation as a shift in corporate priorities, Harvey stated:

> While I know that the company has, you know, input or outcomes that they might want at the end… the bottom line is that… we focus on our students, and [ask] how do we really help them to achieve what is necessary for them.

We dug deeper into this commitment to students by discussing a specific partnership example. Harvey detailed his experience working with a small technology company in a metropolitan area:

> This has been a great opportunity for the students. They… work through what it takes to [work] in a corporate setting, how you interact with employees. They bring students to their site, teach them, and give them an opportunity to participate in a long-term internship with possibilities of gaining employment after that internship is over. I think they gain a lot of significant experience.

He went on to talk about how the organization's leadership is invested in the partnership directly:

> [The President took] them to cultural events in the [metropolitan] area. [Being] pretty wealthy herself, she made sure that she shared that wealth of experience and financial resources with the students in regards to being able to attend events that typically our students would not normally go to. [Our students] being able to really use those skills, hone in on those skills, [will] make them really better.

Theme 2: Tailored Approach - Intentional Efforts Toward Establishing Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

Centering around students also means that corporations should initiate partnerships with HBCUs by having genuine intentions. When it relates to his institution, Harvey said:

> I don't think we have any limitations in regards to trying to establish partnerships. [The] majority of them approached us with engaging in partnerships, [and] we immediately welcomed those opportunities. There's usually not a lot of hesitation or reluctance. We want to be open to forming relationships with corporate partners. We want to be able to interact with [the] professionals in their company, we want to be able to give our students

> the experience that they would be looking forward to later in life. So yes, that's a real plus, that we have no reluctance with welcoming corporations into our sector.

Historically, "when we talk about financial resources, most corporate companies never come to the table saying we want to give you this… they come offering a partnership where [we] grow together… on a common cause." Being in alignment when working towards a common goal is very important for Harvey:

> You want a trusted partnership, first of all; one where everyone is equally giving its entity so that whoever has outcomes, those outcomes can be fulfilled by both partners. Most [corporate partners come] to the table, knowing what they pretty much wanted to leave from the table with. We, [the institution,] want to be a partner, and a partner means it goes two ways. It's 50-50. [We] hear from the company, what it is [they] really want from us? And [we share] what we really want from [them]. So that we can move forward in achieving something significant together. [Partnerships should] really help the HBCU be different than what it was [before the partner] came there.

When working in alignment, Harvey talked about having clear objectives:

> Both groups need to be clearly defined in what their goals and expectations are because it will create problems in the middle of the process. "What's first and foremost important to us? What do we really need to address more than anything?" As opposed to just kind of sitting there wasting time and not really engaging in the right questions and answers that need to be responded to. You just cannot assume this is going to happen, and this is going to be the case, [so] you have to be able to work through those kinds of differences.

To overcome the challenges and risks of misalignment with partners, Harvey expressed the importance of working together and having the right people at the table:

> The right people must be at the table to determine what are the areas that must be focused on. What are our strengths? What are our weaknesses here? What do we want to spend time really trying to engage [in]? What do we want the most for our students? Where do we feel like you [the corporation] can really help us to be valuable in this process? I think that one of the things that most schools fail to realize when they get involved in the relationship is that they haven't sorted through the, kinda little intricacies beforehand.

When at the table, Harvey shared: "Everybody working from the same vantage point, communication, keeping the lines of communication open, working to establish dialogue, from time to time, so that people are feeling, again, that they are part of that process."

Theme 3: Champions Initiate and Drive Corporate Partnerships

Harvey's role at the institution sets him apart from some of the other participants in the study, as his main focus is to "go out and look for" relationships with corporations. This is advantageous for him because he is a native of the area, which enables him to identify the types of connections to create and where to locate them effectively. Harvey shared:

> You cannot sit on the sidelines, you got to really be out there. That's why I engage myself with places like the Chamber of Commerce and [other community groups] where there are people that have access to a number of these different [corporations]. groups, because that way, we can make connections there. [If] you want a part of the… pie and you cannot be away from it.

He proceeded to talk about his experience building up his network:

> I wanted to make sure that we got a piece of the pie like everyone else did. You have to beat the bushes, and you have to be at these events, and you have to be at these networking opportunities to really say, I'm from [this institution]. I want to be making

> sure that we can be a part of that. I mean, you got to be open and offering and welcoming yourself.

The Handoff. Once connections are established, it is crucial to have a proper hand-off and introduction to the institution's leadership and relevant departments. Harvey expressed:

> That's the part I enjoyed most, really trying to determine who this contact was, and how do we really engage them further, interacting with the university. Once we were introduced to a company, I initially made contact with them, [and] introduced them to the chief commander. It's really important to start at the very top for the commander in chief to acknowledge who our players are, and how we continue to support these players. From then on, we forward them on to the various departments, and particularly institution advancement, or career planning and placement so that that growth continues, and they continue to still interact with us.

Unfortunately, there are times when the hand-off process is not as seamless. For instance, Harvey highlighted the difficulties stemming from a lack of follow-through on both the corporate and institutional fronts. In an instance with a corporate partner he formed a connection with, Harvey recalled: "he said [he needed] a chance to do some things and [that] he would get back with me, [but] he really never got back." This hand-off experience can be even more painful when the internal team doesn't follow through on a strong lead. He shared:

> It is very important in terms of who I refer this [connection] to after they [have] left me. [Sometimes] I still have to keep my foot in it, and my hands in it, because the ball often [gets] dropped along the way.

Theme 4: Perspectives of How Capacity Building Impacts Partnership Results

The shortage of personnel at Harvey's institution poses significant challenges for partnership hand-off and follow-through. When individuals are overwhelmed with numerous responsibilities, they "just tend to give up, and that's how those partnerships get dropped." Or, as Harvey explained, there are instances where the partnership hand-off fails to receive the attention it needs to thrive. Harvey talked about instances like this:

> People did not follow through sometimes the way I think they should have, and so it made it difficult for us to keep up with these partnerships. Because of the follow-up. And keeping abreast of what's to come. But really, the follow-up. I've seen so many partnerships dropped because we don't continue to follow-up. [Unfortunately] that's kind of typical in HBCUs, you see the same kind of behavior across the board.

This experience can be even more challenging when it comes to how the state allocates resources to different institutions. Harvey shared his thoughts: "PWIs, I found, always have more resources to work with, and they always have a hand up before… anybody can get to the table." He expressed that corporate partnerships are needed to support capacity building at HBCUs: "They are extremely important because we are only known within a very limited budget from the state. Then if we don't get outside contributions from alumni and donors, and corporations, then we really are not able to survive."

What is Harvey's Lived Experience with Corporate Partners?

Harvey's extensive involvement in his local community, along with his deep connection to his alma mater is shown in his lived experience with corporate partners because it underlines his approach to fostering relationships. He is committed to prioritizing student-centered engagements and went further to share stories about the diverse backgrounds and needs of his

institution's student body, particularly the significant proportion of first-generation college students. Harvey emphasized the importance of forming genuine intentions and having clear objectives when establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with corporate partners. Despite challenges with limited resources and capacity constraints, Harvey continues to maintain a proactive approach to networking and initiating partnerships, as he is driven by his dedication to enhancing opportunities for students and advancing his institution's mission.

January

The narrative below is a synthesis of January's interview conversation, capturing her lived experience. Direct quotes from the interview were analyzed and integrated into the narrative to maintain January's natural linguistic style and perspective.

January holds a doctoral degree and has two decades of professional expertise working with HBCUs, with a decade specifically working at her alma mater where she currently serves as a vice president. Her commitment to serving at an HBCU is rooted in her own experience as a student at the institution. Reflecting on her journey she shared “the vast majority of my experience, with the exception of about two years, has been exclusively in the HBCU arena. As a black woman, Southern, I just, in general, feel like my talents are for my people. And you can do a lot when racism is off the table.”

Theme 1: The Importance of Being Student-Centered When Developing Partnerships

January believes that prioritizing students is fundamental to the mission of higher education. She emphasized the importance of partnerships with HBCUs being student-centered, stating, “without students, I mean, we're not really doing anything. We sell a service, and that service is education. And so, if we don't have students, then we're not providing our service.”

When partnerships are student-focused, all stakeholders reap the benefits and achieve success. January mentioned that certain partnerships can help smaller HBCUs in areas such as student enrollment. She recalled a specific partnership where student enrollment increased because it was comprehensive and addressed diverse student needs. She described the partnership:

> They were able to create an experiential learning opportunity for the student body. [These] partnerships through our experiential learning office [provided] study abroad opportunities for our students and… funding for those opportunities. [Additionally, they] provided opportunities to visit businesses, to show students about the possibilities of occupations that they may not know about. Students had assistantships, and they had housing when they arrived.

Theme 2: Tailored Approach - Intentional Efforts Toward Establishing Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

Being intentional in partnerships is very important, generally speaking, but it becomes especially vital when interacting with HBCUs, particularly smaller ones like January's institution. January shared her perspective on how different HBCUs are viewed:

> I think there's [this] idea that HBCUs are lesser than [other higher education institutions]. Or even that there are only [a select few] HBCUs. So, people think of Spelman, Morehouse, Hampton, Howard, only those four, you know. And that not that I'm hating, I like to see them thrive as well. So, if you're not those, or if you're not the largest state-supported ones, you're seen as lesser than, a lesser choice or something of that nature.

She particularly felt this sting when it comes to corporate partnerships. She explained, "when corporate entities are looking to partner with HBCUs, specifically, they're not looking at all

HBCUs. They're looking at certain ones. And so those same ones are partnered with and funded repeatedly.” This can be challenging when corporations underestimate the quality of individuals from HBCUs. January elaborated:

> If a corporate partner was going to an Ivy or was going to a flagship state institution or a, you know, "prestigious Ivy adjacent type of private school", there'll be a level of automatic respect for the people who work there, who are professors. They'd be seen as experts. The administration would be seen as quality and qualified. The students would be seen as worthy. Whereas with an HBCU, it's those inner-city kids, and those administrators and faculty who can't work anywhere else, you know. Particularly on the small side, not so much on the large state HBCUs. But um, I think, yeah, the approach from a corporate partner is vastly different. The dollar amounts [given to a partnership] are vastly different.

Money Matters. Speaking of the dollar amounts, January explained how even the slightest contribution can have a considerable impact on a smaller HBCU, given their historical underfunding:

> [When] our closest state, flagship competitor is solicited, they [may not] even look at a $10,000 opportunity. Not for the university as a whole, maybe for a major, maybe for an office. But $10,000 [or] $5,000 partnerships or [contributions] that have a valuation of tens of thousands of dollars are, you know, mission-changing for the smaller institutions. [So,] when a million-dollar gift, or a million-dollar partnership for [a small HBCU comes in, it] would pay just about the entire payroll for the year when it's a drop in the bucket somewhere else.

However, she does caution small HBCUs against chasing funds if they are unable to address the institution's underlying issues. She remarked:

> If [partnerships] don't have… the ability to create an environment where… things can grow and flourish, then you're just going after a partnership to plug a financial hole. And once those funds run out, you'll be back in the same spot. And then you'll be running after a different corporate partnership to try to [chase] that financial goal.

She provided an example to illustrate this point with a partnership she encountered with a partner who contributed funding for student scholarships, "once those scholarship dollars ran out, the students did not re-enroll. So, while it was supposed to build the college's capacity, to basically do that on its own, once the funds were completed, it was unsustainable long term."

Do You Fit Our Needs? Reflecting on her experience with established partnerships, January highlighted the challenges that emerged. She recalled how, in many instances, there was a lack of alignment between the institution and the corporate partners, because small HBCUs required the funding and support that was being provided. She said:

> [In my experience] partnerships and opportunities… have more to do with the corporate partner's mission than the university's mission. The university has to be aligned with the partner's mission, not the partner aligning with the university's mission. [In some cases,] there are very narrow parameters, you know. So, you have to fit within those parameters. And a lot, a lot of the partnerships are like that.

Adapting to a corporate partner's requirements can often be the key for small HBCUs to gain recognition, as they work to conform to meet the partner's criteria to secure funding. January explained:

> You need to write your application to fit that [partner.] So, it's really about us. Do we align with the mission of the corporate partner that's offering the partnership? And when it comes to particularly partnerships, where funds are involved, you know, that's how… you close the deal; making sure that your mission is in alignment with the partner's mission.

She went on to say that partners often check for alignment by asking questions like, "Do you have an academic program that aligns with our mission, [or…] with what it is that this corporate entity does?"

Can We Execute on What We Promised? Attempting to fulfill the requirements outlined by a partner can pose an even greater challenge for institutions like January's. This potentially jeopardizes partnerships altogether. She explained, "Reporting requirements may set colleges and universities up for failure. Institutions have to be very careful that they're not getting into something to set them up for failure… because of capacity or the lack thereof." With limited bandwidth at small HBCUs, many are responsible for juggling priorities by having to establish, manage, and report on partnerships. January said:

> You can't evaluate the process when you're in the middle of it. So, at a small institution, each person is in the middle of the process. They can't step away from the process and evaluate its effectiveness and try to change the process or remove barriers in the process; because you're part of the process. [At] a lot of small institutions, the processes are people-driven.

Theme 3: Champions Initiate and Drive Corporate Partnerships

Being at a small HBCU, January explained how most partnerships are established, "partnerships are formed through the institutional advancement office. They're not formed by

going directly to the chair of the education department or the chair of the engineering department." To initiate a partnership a corporation should "contact [that office] ... then the director or executive director [responsible for] sponsored programs or grants." She highlighted one advantage that they have when compared to other small institutions: they have a designated office specifically tasked with managing externally sponsored partnerships, including those with corporations. Explaining this division, she said:

> There [are] program personnel [and] compliance officers. [They are responsible for] making sure that whatever you spend the funds on, is compliant within the parameters of your partnership. So, there's that third-party oversight that's outside of the area that forms the partnership.

In the case of grants that the university seeks out, the staff or faculty member would need to keep all internal parties informed. January explained, "Let's say a faculty person secures a partnership, their executive would be well versed in kind of peripherally involved in that partnership. So that would be the vice president for academic affairs." When talking about how partnerships are driven, she said, "the person who [initiated the partnership is] the principal investigator, for lack of a better term. They [are] the person who [manages] the funds, and who also [reports] back to the [partner]."

Theme 4: Perspectives of How Capacity Building Impacts Partnership Results

Asked to describe the capacity at her current institution, January shared, "my current institution is very small. From a student's perspective, as well as the human capital, all together: students, faculty, and staff." She explained the unique nature of HBCUs in North Carolina and how that impacts capacity, as well, "[we are] in close proximity to each other, so, capacity

building is paramount at those institutions where the student body is small, [and] there's also a small number of people actually working at the institution." At her institution, she explained:

> "[There are] people who, their entire office, it's just one person to service [nearly 1,000] undergraduates. And while [that] …is a very small number, when you have one person operating that office, anything, that's their responsibility or under their sphere of influence, that can be automated, anything a partnership can offer them, where they're able to hire an additional staff and it doesn't come out of their operational budget [is extremely helpful]. Those partnerships that are capacity-building partnerships are, I would say, almost as important for those smaller HBCUs as the ones that result in student enrollment.

Partnership Example. She highlighted the significant impact of both existing and past partnerships at the institution, which have contributed significantly to capacity building. January described:

> We do have or have had in the past, corporate partnerships for capacity building. Human resources, knowledge base, and technology. Some of the capacity building had to do with infrastructure. We have a corporate foundation that has done capacity-building grants. [Those grants] funded recruitment efforts. [We were] able to do commercials… have printed materials… photoshoots, videos, [and we] were able to hire staff. [That partnership] resulted in [us] doubling the number of students enrolled. So, it really impacted the bottom line of that particular [partnership's focus area] …as well as the university as a whole.

Limitations. Partnerships like this are important because small institutions often face limitations in their academic program offerings due to capacity constraints, including a shortage

of faculty. This challenge is intensified by difficulties in recruiting innovative faculty to smaller institutions. January explained:

> [Institutions are] moving away from liberal arts education [throughout] the country to STEM fields. [Some] HBCUs have been slow to embrace STEM education, beyond biology and pre-med, so liberal arts education is not the thing right now, you know. So, a lot of the corporate partnerships are around STEM education, coding, and the like. So, if you're not involved in that at your institution, it could hinder your ability to get those partnerships.

Ideal Partnership. When asked about what an ideal partnership landscape would look like for January and her institution she replied:

> [I'd like to see] partnerships that help us build capacity, and present our students with opportunities, internships, study abroad, and increasing our technological knowledge. [As it relates to] human resources, it would either be like a… professor in residence [or] some sort of, like, expert in residence [where there are] industry people in residence on [our] campus teaching students who are interested in that particular field. [Additionally, we would] …be able to purchase software that helps automate processes [like] those things [that] are integral to our ability to continue to operate, and to continue to compete in today's highly competitive, higher ed landscape.

What is January's Lived Experience with Corporate Partners?

January's rich experience shows us her passion for students and student-centered partnerships at HBCUs. Her insights provide us with a view of the complex challenges and opportunities encountered by smaller institutions like hers, especially when it relates to forging relationships with corporate partners. From her lived experience, it is evident that she stresses the

need for purposeful initiatives to foster partnerships with benefit both parties, all while remaining in alignment with the mission of HBCUs. Her perspective highlights the significance of capacity-building partnerships and how they can help address the unique challenges faced by smaller HBCUs, ultimately improving the student experience and increasing institutional capabilities.

John

The narrative below is a synthesis of John's interview conversation, capturing his lived experience. Direct quotes from the interview were analyzed and integrated into the narrative to maintain John's natural linguistic style and perspective.

John, a first-generation college graduate, holds a master's degree and has 29 years of professional experience in relationship building, with one year dedicated to his current position as vice chancellor at his employing institution. Growing up as a first-generation college student, alongside his mother who attended an HBCU, John has formed a deep affinity for these institutions. Reflecting on his journey he shared, "For so long HBCUs were the only institutions that would educate minorities who were African Americans, in this country. And so, while I attended a PWI as an undergraduate student, my love for HBCUs was always there. [Later,] my sisters both went to HBCUs." He specifically chose to join his current employing institution due to his admiration for its leadership, particularly the chancellor, "I have a high respect for him, he's done a tremendous job of positioning the university [to receive additional funding]."

Theme 1: The Importance of Being Student-Centered When Developing Partnerships

"Everyone Wants to Work with The Winner, Right?" Being a part of one of the larger HBCUs, John recognizes the pivotal role of student-centered partnerships. His institution attracts top-tier students and employers who seek them. John emphasized how partnerships can influence

not just students, but also the institution and the state workforce. Given that students from his institution are frequently recruited by leading companies nationwide, the arrival of new corporate partners in the state often leads to his institution, for partnership, due to the caliber of students it produces. John remarked:

> It's important… to develop these partnerships to enrich the state, the region, [and] the university. When you invest in innovation at a university, then you create a more intelligent student who's ready to work in those industries. Workforce companies, companies that are moving to the state are looking [to] hire highly educated or specialized individuals to work at their companies, in leadership roles, and in staff roles.

John has enjoyed partnering with corporations as they often start with "the idea of student engagement, student scholarship and then internships, and possible workforce opportunities."

Partnership Example. He explained a collaboration between the institution and a pharmaceutical company:

> [The company was] looking for an opportunity to solve… their workforce [challenges] by working to have a curriculum created at our institution. They knew exactly the type of leaders and staff and workers that they want at their company. [In this partnership] they've chosen to invest… by providing the resources to develop the curriculum so that the students who are interested in studying within that curriculum will be better prepared to enter that workforce. So, it helps that company get to where they need faster [and] it helps the university be more innovative. [Additionally, the partnership] provides the faculty [with] increased tools and increased opportunities to even further their study of research, [which] makes the University better.

Theme 2: Tailored Approach - Intentional Efforts Toward Establishing Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

North Carolina has a good climate for business, as John put it:

> North Carolina as a state, in the past two years, has been the number one state for businesses. And so, we have a lot of businesses who [have] started their businesses in North Carolina, have moved their industry to North Carolina, or [have] sought North Carolina as a place where they can research and do good business.

As new partners enter the state, it is important for colleges to be equipped to effectively navigate these potential partnerships. This ensures that they can optimize partnerships for the benefit of both the institution and its students. John used the term "pan-university" to describe the approach that institutions should prioritize in order to maximize partnerships, "A comprehensive holistic… 'pan-university' relationship touches all parts of the university, not just one school or college." Institutions should help partners move from "starting those relationships as transactional, [to] turning them into more comprehensive, pan-university relationships [that are] …not just a one-time opportunity, but [are] sustainable."

Alignment Without Compromise. When digging deeper into his methodology, John highlighted the significance of alignment and working through challenges with partners. He advised, "I think even before you get to the phase where you are bringing other people in or bringing leadership in, you would have wanted to have those conversations early as to what [or] how the alignment should be. He recommended that institutions ask partners, "What are you looking for in working with the University? What are your objectives, your priorities, your timeline for solving these issues?" Intrinsically, the institutions should ask, "What's the investment that makes it worth [our] time?" He echoed:

> We don't want to change our priorities to fit something that a company does. We want to engage with a company where our priorities are also met… because [if] you're dealing with professors who have to not only research but teach classes while you're cutting into that, [then] are [corporate partners] buying out their time?"

When parties in a partnership do not work to form an alignment, they risk experiencing challenges and potentially compromising. He shared challenges such as, "not defining the scope of the work in full or the priorities, or matchmaking what the institution can truly do with what the corporation is looking for." Fit and alignment are crucial to ensure that institutions are not simply chasing after funds. John said:

> So often there are universities that accept dollars because it's a great opportunity… but it doesn't fit within the priorities [and] strategic plan of the university. [In those situations] you'd have to give those dollars back or you end a relationship. That isn't, to use my mom's term… evenly yoked. If it is a relationship that is going to be sustained it has to fit within the university's priorities period.

Decision-Makers. One important element of forming an alignment is ensuring that corporate partners are connected with the right decision-makers and influencers within the institution. John stated, " If you're able to work with decision-makers initially, then you can get to where you're going a lot quicker." He added:

> Oftentimes in some relationships [it] starts with [a] junior director level or mid-manager who wants to have a relationship with the leader of the institution. That's not equitable. If you're looking to create these truly unique, transformational relationships, it has to be with decision-makers for both the company and the institution of the university. That's where the rubber meets the road.

Ideal Partnership Example. John provided a specific partnership example where alignment and involvement of relevant stakeholders were key, and the partnership was approached with a pan-university lens. He emphasized the need for more partnerships of this nature at his institution. John explained:

> There was a long-standing relationship that stemmed out of [the] workforce, [and] career services. Initially [it focused on] recruiting students, then it branched out to opportunities to engage with faculty. [We had] …administration being all part of that because [the corporation was] also making gifts to the university - to have this access. Gradually… other members of the administration or their teams [got] involved along each step as [they] continued to grow that relationship.

He proceeded to emphasize the critical role of communication throughout this partnership for its success, noting:

> There [were] a handful of people from that corporation, who [were] on these calls, a handful of people from the university that [were] on the calls, and they're cross-talking to get to a mutual decision that both company and university [agree to]. [For] this one in particular… they wanted to span across the university. Not just not just one [disciplinary] college.

When discussing the success of this partnership, John attributed its effectiveness to intentionality, stating, “if there's a secret sauce, that's it.”

Theme 3: Champions Initiate and Drive Corporate Partnerships

Crafting intentional corporate partnerships would be challenging without dedicated champions. He particularly highlighted the significant role played by the institution’s alumni base by saying, “The alumni of the university… [have] been extremely philanthropic

[themselves,] but also through the companies [where they work]. [This has] played a role of introducing [the institution] to get to the higher decision-makers [at a corporation]."

A Corporate Partnership Hub. John is working to actively improve the champion structure at his institution. He shared:

> Oftentimes, companies get trapped with an owner who just wants that relationship to live [in their area]. [However,] if you just want that relationship to live [there, then] that partner will never know how deep and wide they can invest in the university. [My division] exists to be a hub rather than an owner. We have a person who is the manager of [corporate] relationships. That one person is responsible, ultimately, for convening between the company and the university, and the team members on the university side. [In addition,] you have that one person on the corporate side who's responsible for making sure that touch points are made on that side. [Our hub serves as] a manager for all these relationships.

The Right People. When managing relationships, John emphasized the significance of having the appropriate representatives at the forefront of the institution when interacting with corporate partners. He said:

> Relationships matter, right? So, you have to have the right people in the conversation. I mentioned decision makers, but good people in the conversations. You know how it is, we have some people who just don't have the personality. So, you want to make sure that you're engaging the right people who have the right temperament… to handle those relationships.

Theme 4: Perspectives of How Capacity Building Impacts Partnership Results

Despite John's institution appearing as an outlier in this sample because of its large size and seemingly fulfilled capacity needs, he clarifies that having the necessary personnel still presents challenges due to bureaucracy. He reflected:

> "Universities are big and complex and sometimes siloed across the enterprise. [For partnerships to work,] you have to work with your partners across the campus. [Unfortunately, we have] big bureaucracies that take forever to make decisions. And the decision tree is oftentimes slow because there's a myriad of other priorities that are happening.

When it comes to navigating bureaucracy, his top advice for higher education institutions and HBCUs is, "[We] need to get better at working at the speed of business."

What is John's Lived Experience with Corporate Partners?

John's experience with corporate partners exemplifies the influence they can have on HBCUs when alignment, effective communication, and acknowledgment of bureaucratic challenges are prioritized. He specifically addressed the need for HBCUs to start thinking more strategically about creating 'pan-university' partnerships, advocating for a shift towards adapting the institution's behaviors to the speed of business. Based on his own journey as a first-generation college graduate, along with his strong commitment to HBCUs, John's passion for fostering impactful partnerships shines through as he works to enhance student experiences, advance institutional goals, and encourage collaborative relationships with corporate partners.

Karen

The narrative below is a synthesis of Karen's interview conversation, capturing her lived experience. Direct quotes from the interview were analyzed and integrated into the narrative to maintain Karen's natural linguistic style and perspective.

Karen is a first-generation college graduate whose journey led her to obtain a doctoral degree and return to her alma mater, where she currently serves as a Department Chair and Associate Professor. With seven of her nine years of professional experience being dedicated to her employing institution, Karen has a deep commitment to her alma mater and "felt a bit invested in, just like, the progress of the students here." Her decision to return to the institution was also driven by:

> "My own experience as a student and the types of interactions I had with my professors. And moving on to a primarily White institution for graduate school, it was very apparent the different environment and so I knew in graduate school that I wanted to be in an HBCU environment because I enjoyed it as a student, and I thought that I could give back."

Theme 1: The Importance of Being Student-Centered When Developing Partnerships

Karen, in her role as Associate professor, consistently prioritizes her students above all else. Her daily tasks and duties revolve around ensuring the best possible outcomes for students at her institution. She said, "We can't function without students." She initiates her corporate partnerships with a student-centered approach at the forefront of priorities. She added:

> "[I'm responsible for] making sure that they are at the center and the focus. [So being] student-focused is like number one. Like, we're not going into this thing if we're not thinking about how students are going to benefit. [Because, in return] the corporate side

> is learning the needs of diverse students and [are] able to better recruit those types of students and offer services and offer basically what is needed for them to be successful."

Partnerships Make Real-World Connections. Karen believes that partnerships are crucial for providing students with real-world experiences, like internships and job shadowing opportunities, which support their career readiness. She shared:

> I think it's important because of the students that are here. Just giving them the insight of what it looks like after they complete their degree. Giving them, you know, hands-on experience, that they're able to complete internships or shadowing."

Feedback from students helps to measure the success of partnerships, which ensures that they are beneficial and that they support students in pursuing their career goals. Karen said:

> "Oh, I will know [if a partnership is working] based off of student feedback. [Additionally,] if they are able to participate and benefit from the resources that are there, they will go on and pursue whatever career of their dreams. That's how we'll know that it's beneficial [in the long run]."

Turnover Impact. Karen emphasized the significance of maintaining stable relationships, emphasizing how turnover in partnerships, be it from the institution or corporation side, can hinder student progress. She said, "Just thinking about losing those relationships can be detrimental for student progress overall. If that happens, then you may have lost, like, a major advantage for students.

She talked about how this can make it even harder on HBCUs as "we are already trying to play catch up [in the partnership space] and have to make sure our students have the appropriate opportunities.

Theme 2: Tailored Approach - Intentional Efforts Toward Establishing Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

HBCUs Have a Rich Pool for Diversity. Recognizing the significance of her institution as an HBCU, Karen understands its appeal to corporations, particularly due to their diverse student population. However, she emphasized that while DEI objectives are important, they should not be the only thing that drives corporate partnerships. She said:

> I think being designated as an HBCU is kind of like an easy target in the sense because you have a mindset of what you think you're getting there. And so that then makes HBCUs attractive for corporations because they're already dipping into this pool of diversity.

That pool of diversity is rich for corporations, Karen added:

> Diversity, inclusion, and equity is like everybody's favorite term in a sense. And that brings in lots of money - it can be very lucrative, in a sense. because we have a diverse population of students and Corporations see value in that, whether it's genuine or not, but hopefully it is. And there is evidence to show that having a diverse group of people is beneficial.

The evidence she spoke of, like McKinsey's 2023 Diversity Impact report, is referenced by corporations to help emphasize the value of diversity and its financial impacts (McKinsey & Company, 2023). While that value is important, Karen talked about how there must be mutual value for the institution as well. When in the initial phase of a partnership, she focuses on "vetting and seeing the investment from the corporation side on what they're willing to offer, and how they bring us into the conversation and let us sit at the table to make decisions. Instead of just being told this is what we have." She questions, "Is this really genuine? Or are you just using

us in order to secure funding or just to look good or, say, put our logo to say that you partner with us?"

Vetting Partners. Vetting partners for genuine investment and ensuring that they are actively involved, and collaborative are key priorities that we continuously heard from Karen. "I think continuity… and shared goals [are important in] making sure that both parties are invested for the right reasons." She refers back to her analytical experience by emphasizing that, "data doesn't lie. So, like, five plus five is gonna be ten every time." She used this to explain that she focuses on what companies have historically done in their performance. She questions, "What have the corporations done in the past, and how they've built that relationship? And how they see it going forward?" Karen added, "Those are real things that you can measure. You can ask questions and you can get real numbers out. I want to know if you're invested. Did you take time to do your research, and then show that evidence in the form of data." She advised that other institutions should "make sure that [they] prioritize what is important. Don't let the corporation lead you down the road that wasn't even your focus. Communication… is essential, because… that's gonna then build a strong relationship."

She expressed the importance of working together by collaborating:

> You don't want to feel like just a bystander, an onlooker. You want to be actively involved. So, collaboration is key because that goes back to the diversity. My lived experience is going to be different than yours. And so, working together, to like, pour our thoughts into a shared bucket and then, like, filter through them is like true collaboration. And then making sure that both parties are benefiting from that collaboration. That is not just like a parasitic relationship.

Sustainable Partnerships & Developing Faculty. Once partnerships are established, Karen likes to ensure that they are sustainable. She said:

> [I am] always looking to expand. And not only how we can be involved in a corporation, but how we can build something sustainable at the institution as well. Like what new programs can we offer? What new courses can we offer? What is really going to enhance the student learning? [This] is something that [I] wouldn't want to be lost in a corporate partnership.

An essential part of ensuring sustainability is facilitating connections between partners and various departments within the university. In her role as a Department Chair, Karen naturally links partnerships with faculty members, fostering collaboration and engagement across the academic space. She expressed that she values "knowledge sharing with faculty." This includes having them "participate in professional development from those that are trained in the field." It is important for her faculty to "stay up to date with different processes as it relates to the corporate world and how we can incorporate that in our classrooms."

An Ideal Situation. When describing an ideal partnership, Karen stated that it is important to, "make sure that they are being respectful of our time." She further described this as:

> Having a dedicated person that follows up and is a point of contact, and not just being bounced around from person to person. Can we get in contact with them? Do they follow up? Are they showing us, or do we have to ask for feedback? [In this partnership, they] really come up with goals and objectives for the partnership, say for this year, for the next five years, and then reevaluating to make sure that… you're making progress.

According to Karen, making progress can be measured by participation. She added:

> Participation is key. So, say, for instance, we have a partnership with a particular corporation and they're offering internships. [We would want to know] how many of our students are applying? How many of our students are competitive? How many of our students are actually securing the internships?

Theme 3: Champions Initiate and Drive Corporate Partnerships

Partners are initiated in many different ways at Karen's institution. Some have "come about because of the corporation [calling] for a particular purpose, then [we] apply for that opportunity." She shared that others may "come in from sister institutions… working together to bring in partners like HBCUs working with PWIs to go after or be involved in [a] corporation for the benefit of students." She continued to talk about how good previous partnerships can lead to future partnerships:

> [Suppose we] were awarded from this corporation or this company. And so, the corporation was aware of the name [and] they were pleased with the previous interaction. So, when they hear [about our] institution being involved, regardless of the person, they were still very receptive because they had a positive experience [which] definitely matters.

In other instances, she explained, partnerships may come from someone diverse within the corporation who wants to connect with her institution. Karen said:

> I hear that all the time [when] I meet somebody from a diverse background, and they're now a part of corporation X, and it is their mission to involve HBCUs. It's their mission to make sure that they have more diverse faces, and sometimes it takes a person like that, getting in, in order to bring others on board.

In her role as a Department Chair, she shared:

> In the position that I serve, which does have an administration role, I do have a broader view on how to move my unit forward. And I have the freedom in a sense to propose those ideas and also participate and learn about new you know, new ventures, new ways to engage students and faculty in order to, like, keep us relevant.

Karen explained that she is not only responsible for proposing new ideas, but also executing on them. When asked about who the program champions are at her institution, Karen replied:

> [It can vary] from individual faculty, like myself, from the dean of the college, and even the provost. Some are program directors for graduate programs. Others are like tenured professors that have a little bit more time and can dedicate to it. Others are like directors of specific units. [There is also] somebody [specifically] dedicated to building partnerships at our institution.

Partnerships Should Be Supported. While partnerships can come from anywhere in the institution, it is important that they are acknowledged and supported by the upper administration. Karen elaborated:

> When corporations are giving financial support, they want to see that if it's an individual that's leading the charge, that they have institutional support. It's hard to go forward with large investments from corporations, from a single, like, faculty or staff, without the institution showing their support at a high administrator level, whether that is the Provost or the Chancellor. [With one of the corporate partnerships] it was absolutely required, during our pitch, that either the Provost or Chancellor was on that call. They showed up and they spoke about the institution and how they were going to support me and this partnership.

Theme 4: Perspectives of How Capacity Building Impacts Partnership Results

When reflecting on capacity building, Karen expressed it, “in the sense that we have all the tools at our institution in order to like progress for both students and for faculty.” She added that capacity building is important, particularly to HBCUs, because of “the background of the institution, and the diverse population, [which] sometimes leads others to believe that we can't meet the demand.” She elaborated on the challenges of HBCUs often coming to the table and having a lack of knowledge, which can impact institutional capacity. She said:

> I always think we don't know what we don't know. Like I feel like it's some type of unwritten code with other ethnicities or other races. I don't know. Like we don't even know what we're missing out on because we don't even know that it exists.

Karen believes that it is crucial for HBCUs to self-reflect before embarking on corporate partnerships. She said:

> I think especially for HBCUs like we want these things, but it's like, do we have the capacity to even do that? Do we have the manpower? Do we have the facilities? So, we have to do some self-reflection of ourselves to see [if] we are even capable and if not, we're gonna take a year off to grow, then come back and say this is what we have to offer. How can we work with that?

Personnel Challenges. She acknowledges that the primary challenge in capacity building for her institution is centered around its personnel. She shared:

> Change in leadership - and I think that goes back to like continuity of personnel [because] everybody, for the most part, [has] their own agenda. If you ask me what kind of partnerships I want to build and what kind of things I want to see [it is different than others]. So, when new leadership comes in, there is often a turnover in the corporations

> and partnerships that the institution has. I wish every unit could have… somebody dedicated to advancing [partnerships].

Juggling Multiple Priorities. Assigning a dedicated liaison to oversee partnerships would greatly benefit Karen and her colleagues. She emphasized the difficulty of giving partnerships her undivided attention, due to managing multiple priorities. Karen explained:

> When you have a significant role, especially as a faculty member at an institution… you can get very busy with tedious tasks. Usually when you have good people, and you know that they do good work, they start getting more and more responsibilities. [So] if you really want [partnerships] to be beneficial, [people] have the time to do so, and make sure that things are being done and they're not being overworked.

She talked about how corporations can help with capacity building by providing funding or personnel to help with human capital. She added, "whether that means bringing more people that are willing to do the work to the table or freeing up that person's time so they can dedicate [their time] to something that is… going to be important."

What is Karen's Lived Experience with Corporate Partners?

Karen's lived experience with corporate partners revolves around her deep commitment to her alma mater and her passion for supporting students. She approaches corporate partnerships with a focus on ensuring that students benefit from real-world experiences and opportunities that enhance their career readiness. She prioritizes sustainability in partnerships and emphasizes the importance of vetting partners for genuine investment and active involvement. Karen recognizes the significance of champions who initiate and drive corporate partnerships within her institution, stressing the need for institutional support and continuity of personnel to effectively manage and sustain partnerships. She identifies capacity building, particularly in terms of

personnel and resources, as a key challenge for her institution but sees potential for corporations to contribute to this by providing funding or personnel support.

Sunny

The narrative below is a synthesis of Sunny's interview conversation, capturing her lived experience. Direct quotes from the interview were analyzed and integrated into the narrative to maintain Sunny's natural linguistic style and perspective.

Sunny, who holds a doctoral degree, has “been working with HBCUs [for] almost 20 years.” Currently serving as vice president at her institution for almost three years, she was drawn to her current role due to both its location and her passion for HBCUs. “I’ve always been interested and invested in HBCUs,” she shared. “[My current role] gave me an opportunity to help rebuild and reimagine [this institution].”

Theme 1: The Importance of Being Student-Centered When Developing Partnerships

Sunny expressed the importance of being student-centered when developing partnerships as they should ensure that students receive relevant knowledge, exposure, and experiences that prepare them for the workforce. She shared:

> [Being] student-centered is the purpose for our institutions; to educate them. And educating doesn't just mean giving them content knowledge, but giving them exposure experiences, right? What's the saying, people can't become what they don't see. I think particularly with first-generation college students, they have tunnel vision about opportunities when it comes to occupations. Think about business. They think, oh, banks, but guess what? The [another industry] also needs folks who are business majors. And

> then psychology majors. Well, I can become a psychiatrist. No, there's other things that you can do with a psychology major through human resources and things like that. [So] our corporate partners can come in and say okay, so you're studying? Well, this is how I use x day to day in my livelihood.

Student-Aligned Partnerships. Prior to entering partnerships, Sunny expressed that they must be aligned with students. She said:

> [Partnerships] have to be student-centered. [We should ask] …what are the students asking for? And even, not what the students are asking for, [but] what do the students not know what to ask for? [Then] we provide that to them from that student-centered focus."

She recalled the best experiences she has had with corporate partners because they offered students experiential learning opportunities, and scholarships, and provided support tailored to their unique needs. Sunny stated:

> We have corporate sponsorships when it comes to scholarships, financial aid, and endowments. We have partnerships with [a specific industry] because a number of our students are interested in the [field of work]. And so, we've been working very intentionally with experiential learning opportunities with our area [corporate partners].

Connecting Work & Academia Experiences. Student's engagements with industry helps them to gain real-work experience and the ability to apply the experience to their academic learnings, ultimately influencing their career paths, beyond their initial goals. Partnerships with industry help to bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical skills that keep students and faculty informed about current trends and practices in their fields. She echoed:

> Our goal is to, of course, prepare our students for the workforce. And so, we can provide the theory but when it comes to the practice, when you think about it, a lot of professors

> have been out of their subject matter fields, or many of them have never been in the field they've only been educators. [So] what better way to prepare them for the workforce than to have a partnership with those who will be receiving them.

Partnership Example. She recalled a specific partnership example where the goal is to increase students' industry knowledge:

> The goal of that partnership is to ensure that our students are not only receiving relevant knowledge and information from a classroom's perspective but [also] what are the recent trends and processes and things of that nature associated with [the industry] to keep them in the know. We all know life is forever evolving, right? And the worst thing you can do is to not be as up to date as possible with the comings and goings of… new practices [and] new positions that are being created.

In an ideal setting, student-centered partnerships can help contribute to economic development by creating opportunities for students to gain experience locally that continue to be leveraged post-graduation. Sunny added:

> I think it's great for corporate partners to come in and… help with the economic development in certain areas by keeping those students there upon graduation. We have a number of students who desire to stay in the area. And then, of course, the [local economy] wants to keep the students. [Thus] creating pipelines of opportunities.

Theme 2: Tailored Approach - Intentional Efforts Toward Establishing Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

Throughout her story Sunny emphasized the importance of having mutually beneficial partnerships, where both parties gain a return on investment. This includes ensuring that

resources like time, talent, and financial support are utilized effectively to benefit students and achieve shared goals. Sunny stated:

> The main thing that's critical [for partnerships] is the return on investment for both parties involved. We need to know that our time, talent, [and] treasure, being our students, faculty, and staff, those resources are being used appropriately. All of them… [need] to gain something as a result of the goals and objectives. And then on the other side, when it comes to a partnership. Most of the time we're asking for what, financial support, so what are their dollars, [and] what is the return on investment as a result of their dollars being included? So, we need to make sure that both are gaining and not losing from such a partnership. And the return on investment, of course, will be different for each side. But we want to make sure that there's not a loss on either end.

She stresses the need for lasting, intentional relationships, rather than one-off connections:

> I don't want one-hit wonders. Are y'all here for just a one-off, or are you intentional about creating any intentional partnership? When we think of partnerships, you think of marriages, you think of relationships, and you think of lasting not.

Timebound Relationships. Understanding the time frame of a relationship, upfront, helps partnerships to have clarity. Sunny explained:

> Other factors are time, definitely time. If we're coming up with ideas, what's the time to completion? You know, because corporations have their own schedules, we have our own schedules. So, what is the timing of whatever we're trying to do? You get the red, yellow and green. Is it something quickly that we can implement and get done now? Is it something we got to pause for? Is it something that's going to take phases for us to do?

Teamwork & Collaboration. Sunny also explained the value of teamwork and collaboration in creating successful partnerships, adding that it is crucial for partnerships to have equitable distribution of responsibilities:

> Another factor is also the requirements from us or from an educational perspective. Sometimes when you create partnerships, the onus goes on one side and not the other. So, you don't want to "bear the burden" of this partnership. We have to be working in an equitable manner to make things work. [The relationship] can't just be one side, we're all in this together. Right? Even on both sides. Teamwork makes the dream work. [Think] 'we not me.' I took that "we not me" from Paul Quinn's President, Michael Sorrell, so I can't take credit for that. And with that said, truly, clearly identify who is the person from our institution, but who is the person from the corporate entity that will work together.

Prioritization. The best partnerships, according to Sunny's experience, should also be prioritized. She explained:

> Prioritization, again, I'm getting back to the one-offs. Are we a priority? [Or] are we just something that you all are checking off with your corporate organization to say that we support [an HBCU]? And if we are a priority, how do we know that we are [a] priority and how does your corporation know where priority? We should be known top to bottom, not bottom to top. It should be known top to bottom [that] this is what we're doing with [HBCUs]. If the head [of a company] doesn't know, [then] that lets you know the priority.

Alignment. For students to truly reap the benefits of these corporate partnerships, they need to be aligned with industry needs and trends. Sunny stated:

> When it comes to trends and the breaking research and things like that, corporate holds that. And so how are they helping us to strategize with what we're doing from an educational perspective? Whether, you know, [they] help us to create a hub or help us to think about a new and imagine major and things like that. We need to know what the workforce [is] looking like… which also helps us to look at our academic programs. You know, are there things that we need to be looking at, that we're not doing? Are the things that we need to… enhance? Or… there may be [academic practices that are] obsolete for our particular area, or just in general. So, creating those partnerships helps us to assess what we're doing, and hopefully vice-versa.

Communication Challenges. Sunny highlighted a significant challenge regarding communication before partnerships are established. She noted the lack of customized communication, and how personalized messaging can foster genuine connections.

> I always say I wish when it comes to higher ed, you could take the names of institutions away and just give [the] characteristics of the schools. I bet you more times people would choose HBCUs than predominantly White institutions. [Some corporations] go by what they've heard of HBCUs, instead of getting to know institutions.

She recalled her experience with the lack of tailored messaging from corporations, and how that can discourage HBCU leaders from wanting to engage. She stated:

> With spam and phishing and all of that, people don't know what's legitimate and what's not. We too want personal communications, and not an email that is sent to the masses. Like, it burns my soul, and I'm not trying to be funny when someone sends [my institution] an email, but it has whomever else as the institution. I mean, I know we're all human, but that burns me up when I see that, and I call it out. So [I recommend] being

intentional and not sending a mass email if you're really intentional about creating partnerships.

Partnership Evolution. Sunny highlighted the evolution of a partnership with a local [industry leader] sharing, “This partnership has evolved because of our focus on [the industry] as an institution." The partnership influences academic initiatives, with Sunny mentioning, "From an academic perspective, they have paid special attention to initiatives that we have in our science courses." This collaboration extends beyond academic works, as Sunny explained, "This company has been helping us from an academic perspective, but also from a student experience perspective." The partnership involves supporting students [by] facilitating industry services on campus, as Sunny noted, "they're helping us with the technologies and platforms… they have worked to also help us have [industry services that support students] come to campus.”

In this partnership, Sunny emphasizes the importance of establishing rapport, stating, "It's important to establish a rapport with individuals so they know okay, this is [my institution’s] student, let's see what they're talking about and see if we can help them." Additionally, she beams about how the corporate partner has open communication with the institution. Sunny explained, "[They are] always reaching back out to see what's going on. Is there something else you need? How's this working out? What was the student's feedback?"

Theme 3: Champions Initiate and Drive Corporate Partnerships

As a leader on campus and within the community, Sunny actively seeks opportunities to bridge connections between her institution and external partners. She serves as a liaison, identifying potential collaborations and facilitating conversations to align mutual interests. She shared:

> Being in leadership on campus means you also have to work to be in leadership in the community, so you can stay connected and hear what's going on and know the ins and outs. I'm always… interacting with people in the community. I'm always trying to connect, how does this fit what we're trying to do at our institution? Who would be the best fit, if not me, to engage in conversation? So, a lot of times I serve as a liaison or a conduit to bridge things.

Leveraging Your Network. An example of partnership initiation involves Sunny's involvement in a leadership program, where she established connections with individuals [from a large corporation]. She recalled:

> I was in a leadership program in the community, just working to get more familiar. And I was able to connect with a number of individuals that are associated with this [large corporation]. [Additionally, an employee] who used to be a part of this [corporation] …still [had] some connections. [So] we kind of have a trifecta now with this partnership.

Sunny demonstrates a forward-thinking approach, prioritizing future goals over past practices. She said:

> I'll be very transparent and I'm learning to toot my own horn. I think differently than a lot of people in higher ed. Or I think differently as a newer person to my institution because I don't have tunnel vision about the past I try to look forward.

Theme 4: Perspectives of How Capacity Building Impacts Partnership Results

Sunny explores how capacity building significantly influences partnership outcomes, discussing different challenges and opportunities. She recognizes the deep-rooted resistance to change, emphasizing how it is important for HBCUs to adapt. She shared rebuttals that she often hears from others, such as:

> We've always done it this way. And we're gonna keep doing it this way. I'm a graduate of this institution, and we want to keep these same requirements, [and] same experience that we've had since 1800 whatever, or 1900 whatever. [For] some [it] is, it wasn't my idea, so I'm not going to support it. [While others say] I don't necessarily care for you, so I'm not going to support it.

She continued to explain hesitations such as, “fear of blazing your own trail and still wanting to be like everybody else. PTSD. Things didn't work out before. You know, we tried something similar. [Then, simply put, some people] don't want to put in work.” Furthermore, she recognizes the need for institutions, like hers, to adapt to new challenges, sharing, “Sometimes people get so head down, they don't come up to see okay, it's a new day. There's new things we need to think about.”

Mutually Beneficial Partnerships Build Capacity. In partnerships, Sunny aims for mutually beneficial outcomes, particularly when they contribute to the capacity building of financial and human resources. She mentioned, “What I tell a number of companies - Yes, we love your financial resources, but we love your human resources just as well.” She provided an example of partnerships in alleviating faculty burdens, noting, “if we're able to create partnerships where they have release [of their time] and have guest lecturers [from the corporation], and that's a win, win.”

Internal Challenges. Sunny addressed challenges such as turnover and the need for designated partnership overseers, stating, “I work at an HBCU [and] I look like the Dr. Seuss character with multiple hats on top… I would love to be able to have an individual that's responsible for strategic partnerships.” She urges HBCUs to modernize structures and roles to remain competitive, stating, “at HBCUs, I do think, we need to look at if we have the right

individuals in roles in the right fit... Dinosaurs are existent for some reason." Acknowledging missed opportunities due to slow responsiveness, Sunny admits:

> Whether intentional or not, we've been known to not respond. And I can say that because I've worked at multiple institutions. Part of the reason that I wear 50,000 hats is because I respond. And people know, well I can reach out to that individual, and they'll get me connected.

She concludes by empathizing with the challenges faced by HBCUs in managing limited resources and capacity, admitting, "in [our] defense, however, because we're small, we get overwhelmed too."

What is Sunny's Lived Experience with Corporate Partners?

Having been involved with HBCUs for nearly two decades, Sunny's passion for her institution and her role in rebuilding and reimagining them is evident through her lived experiences with corporate partners. As a student-centered leader, she always focuses on making sure that partnerships provide students with relevant knowledge, exposure, and experiences to prepare them for the workforce. When engaging in partners, Sunny pushes for the need for mutually beneficial partnerships with sustainability and ROI for both parties and not just "one-hit wonders." Sunny recognizes the historical internal challenges that HBCUs face when engaging in external partnerships but encourages institutional leaders to see that "it's a new day [and] there are new things we need to think about."

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we delve into the firsthand experiences of seven leaders from HBCUs who took part in our research. Drawing from interviews guided by the partnership development

model framework proposed by Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki, we present their narratives. These narratives underscore the importance of purposeful partnerships for HBCUs, tailored to their specific needs and goals. The chapter begins by providing an overview of both the institutions and participants involved in the study. We then delve into the initial findings from the participants' pre-screening survey, followed by an explanation of the data analysis process that identified key themes. Each of these themes is discussed in detail to illustrate its relevance to the narratives. Following this, we structure individual participant narratives, incorporating their accounts and interview insights on the study's key themes. Finally, the chapter concludes with a comprehensive summary. Through this exploration, we aim to shed light on the experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year HBCUs who have engaged in collaborations with external corporate partners to enhance their institutions.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

This closing chapter highlights the conclusions that were formed from the data collected by participants. In this chapter, the researcher will present key findings and connect them to the existing literature and driving frameworks. In addition, the researcher will present implications for policy, practice, and future research. The chapter concludes with a statement of the researcher's positionality.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of administrative leaders at HBCUs who have engaged with corporate partners at their institutions. This study was guided by the overarching research question:

> What are the lived experiences of administrative leaders from 4-year Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) who have collaborated with external corporate partners in an effort to support, develop, and enhance their institutions?

Summary of Key Findings

The qualitative data captured from participants helped to identify key findings and make connections to the guiding conceptual framework from Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki (2007), as well as the supporting conceptual frameworks from Grace (2002) and Brown, Williams, and Esters (2021). While this study was limited to HBCUs within North Carolina, findings from the study align with the literature, which explores the unique nature of HBCUs and how corporate partnerships can help them to overcome historical disparities.

Connections to Amey, Eddy & Ozaki's 2007 Partnership Development Model

The interview protocol for this study was driven by the conceptual framework of Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki's 2007 Partnership Development Model. Questions were formed and organized based on each of the components of the model. **Appendix F** shows how questions were aligned.

Antecedents. The model begins with antecedents, which the authors describe as incentives for partnership, encompassing "prior relationships, resource needs, or challenging issues" (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007, p. 10). In this study, various events, characteristics, and circumstances prompted external corporate partners to engage with HBCUs. One significant antecedent was the presence of individuals who were considered to be partnership development champions. These champions ranged from higher administration leaders to alumni and faculty. They all utilized their networks and connections with corporate partners to form partnerships with their respective institutions.

Another antecedent identified was the Black Lives Matter movement, sparked by the death of George Floyd. Participants *Harvey*, *January*, *John*, and *Sunny* all shared concerns regarding corporations' motivation to collaborate with HBCUs, particularly in light of the Black Lives Matter movement and the tragic murder of George Floyd. *January*, *Harvey*, and *John* all mentioned an increase in corporate attention and financial support immediately following the events of George Floyd's death. They noted that corporations suddenly recognized the need to support HBCUs and initiatives related to DEI in response to public pressure and social movements like Black Lives Matter. Harvey stated, "I saw a shot load of calls that came through. You know, people wanting to be involved with our communities." January added, "During the period immediately following the murder of George Floyd, there was a flurry of DEI efforts on the part of businesses, of foundations, and so on and so forth. Lots of talk about reparations."

The study further revealed additional reasons prompting corporations to collaborate with HBCUs, such as their diverse student population and the presence of signature, nationally recognized programs with successful Black and Brown graduates. Ashley stated, "A lot of our partnerships come from that because we are, like, one of the only, well, one of the few, HBCUs to have this specific signature program. So that automatically attracts partners." John echoed this sentiment, adding, "Our university has become renowned in [the] space of STEM education… [there are] a myriad of… academic and workforce opportunities."

Motivation & Context. Next, the model moves into motivations to create or join a partnership along with the importance of understanding the context of the partnership as it "plays a critical role [and helps guide] the rationale for initial involvement and usually has an impact on sustainability" (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007, p. 10). Participants shared examples of specific partnerships with external corporate partners, which revealed that in many cases, partnerships were driven by the corporate partner's needs, with the hope that the institution would feel the impact over time. This impacted motivation in some instances because once the corporate partner achieved their goal, the institution was left to determine how to make things work going forward, which made partnerships unbalanced and not mutually beneficial, which participants all desired. This was an interesting finding given that when participants talked about their ideal partnerships, they longed for partnerships that would help with things that the authors addressed, like capacity building for funding and human resources, and enrollment support, in some cases.

Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki (2007) dive into this aspect of the model, particularly when examining trustworthiness and motivations for partnering. They emphasize the significance of partnership capital and the density of partner relationships. Each partner brings their own influence and unique motivations to the table. They state, "If benefits begin to accrue

significantly more for one partner than the other, [then] motivation to participate can change" (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007, p. 11). This observation aligns closely with the experiences shared by participants. One participant, *Ashley*, specifically addresses this point by cautioning against accepting every corporate partnership offer, as it may not always align with the institution's best interests.

Feedback. The authors state that the "key to the model, and partnership success, is how…members frame the partnership and how this changes as the partnership continues" (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007, p. 11). Throughout the study, a theme emerged regarding feedback and open communication. This was especially crucial as partnership dynamics, expectations, and outcomes changed throughout the partnership. Several participants noted that feedback from students was most important in determining the direction of the partnership, which sometimes may not align with corporate goals. They expressed the importance of ensuring partnerships were student-centered from the beginning so that incorporating student feedback could be a key performance indicator. The authors explain that feedback is critical in the developmental phase of a partnership, as outcomes should be clear. The experiences of participants aligned with this as they all stressed clear goals, expectations, and roles for partnerships to ensure that they remained in alignment with partners.

The Champion. The model defines the partnership champion as "a person or group that advocates for the initiative… [and] believes in the partnership and its goals" (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007, p. 11). In the context of HBCUs, partnership champions are those who initiate and drive partnerships forward. Given their limited human resources, many HBCU leaders must actively seek out partnerships. Once secured, they assume responsibility for executing and reporting on them to both the institution and the corporate partner. This task can be particularly

challenging for those juggling multiple roles and responsibilities. As mentioned in her narrative, Sunny, a vice president at her institution, related this challenge to balancing multiple hats like a character from Dr. Seuss. As an accomplished champion, Bruce compared himself to a five-star recruit, possessing the skills and experience to identify, secure, execute, report on, and sustain partnerships.

The authors emphasize that "The champion needs to have the support of the positional leader but does not have to be in a particular position of traditional power within the organization" (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007, p. 11). Karen noted an example by highlighting the importance of institutional leadership involvement in any partnership. John echoes this sentiment by stressing the need for decision-makers and individuals with authority to collaborate early and effectively to ensure partnership support and action. Throughout the study, it was interesting to find that many of the partnerships established and being driven were not by Chancellors or Presidents of institutions. This relates closely to what Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki mention here. Champions do not always have to be the positional leader but should have the support of them. Both Karen and John talked about how they had the support of their chancellor in cultivating and building partnerships.

Maintaining support from the chancellor helps with authority and influence, as their endorsement lends credibility to the efforts of institutional champions and signals to stakeholders that the partnership is a priority for the institution. Chancellors play a key role in allocating resources and prioritizing initiatives within the institution. Their support ensures that adequate resources, such as funding, staff time, and administrative support, are allocated to support the development and implementation of corporate partnerships effectively. Additionally, chancellors are responsible for setting the strategic direction and priorities of the institution. Their support

ensures that corporate partnerships align with the institution's overall mission, vision, and strategic goals. This alignment enhances the likelihood of successful partnership outcomes and maximizes the impact of partnership initiatives on institutional objectives.

Partnership Outcomes.

As stated by Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki, "Partnerships change and morph over time as issues change, the role of the champion shifts, and new partners become involved. Sustainable partnerships are based on being flexible to new inputs and adjusting accordingly" (Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007, p. 12). This research reveals that intentional and comprehensive partnerships have the potential to become more deeply integrated into an organization's processes, as emphasized by the authors, which enhances their longevity. Alternatively, one-sided or forced partnerships tend to be short-lived and transactional, thus affecting the growth process. In the context of this study, participants expressed a desire for more holistic partnerships, driven by their need to address historical disparities and catch up to the high-quality relationships that external corporate partners have with PWIs. While this remains an ongoing challenge, all participants noted their efforts to maximize existing partnerships, even those that are transactional in nature. It is important to note that partnerships are valuable even when they are short, and the goals are met. Despite their tenure, partnerships that prioritize student outcomes are particularly meaningful to HBCU administrative leaders, as students must always remain at the core focus.

Findings from this study emphasize the importance of corporate partners taking the lead in engaging with HBCUs from the standpoint of mutual benefit and openness to evolve partnerships towards a more holistic approach. Holistic external corporate partnerships are not only desired by HBCUs, but they are essential for their sustainability and success. Most

importantly, these all-encompassing partnerships can positively impact the most crucial stakeholders, the students, all while benefiting both HBCUs and corporate partners.

Connections to the Conceptual Frameworks: Grace (2002) and Brown, Williams & Esters (2021)

In this study, both the interview protocol and the initial screening survey incorporated questions related to the conceptual frameworks. In the initial screening survey, participants were asked about their alignment with the frameworks; **Appendix C** includes the screening questions that were asked. In the interview, participants were asked to elaborate on their selections in an effort to further align their lived experiences with external corporate partners with the two frameworks.

Brown, Williams & Esters' Shared Leadership Practices.

According to the survey results, shown in Figure 8, the research discovered that all participants agreed that partnerships should be student-centered, which aligned with the same results from the 2021 study from Brown, Williams, and Esters. In their study, presidents shared that "partnerships must account for the current and future needs of students to be truly beneficial for the university" (Brown, Williams & Esters, 2021, p. 13). This was a continuous theme throughout the interviews as participants shared that they lead with students in mind because students are their primary focus as an institution for higher education.

Most participants agreed with partnerships being data-driven as data is how partnerships can be measured to ensure effectiveness. As a researcher by nature, Karen shared that data doesn't lie and that she expects to see the results and impacts of partnerships both prior to and throughout the partnership. Many participants shared that this could look like the number of

students hired into an internship program, the amount of funds given for student scholarships, or even the increase in enrollment due to the enhancement of a curriculum program, thanks to corporate partners. Partnerships that were both prioritized and collaborative in nature were practices selected by most participants. The research showed that participants want intentional partnerships with external corporate partners and want to be involved in the inception, development, and sustainability or growth of a partnership. Participants want to be heard and want to feel like corporate partners are there for them. This was exemplified in the number of examples provided on corporate partnerships being similar to a relationship. HBCU leaders believe that corporate partners should get to know them, their needs, and their students in order to maximize the relationship. Lastly, most participants agreed that partnerships should be innovative. There was a recurring message of HBCUs feeling dated in their industry preparedness for students. This was demonstrated from learning about the need for curriculum updates to be aligned with current industry trends and the technology that needs to be improved on HBCU campuses to ensure that students have the resources needed to lead and think innovatively. Findings from both the survey and interviews demonstrate that this framework is well aligned with the needs, expectations, and experiences of participants.

Grace's Successful Partnership Characteristics.

As shown in Figure 9, participants had varied reactions in the initial survey regarding the characteristics of a successful corporate partnership. Through interviews, the researcher found that many viewed these traits as aspirations rather than realities in partnerships. Among these traits, all participants agreed on the importance of having clearly defined goals and responsibilities, which closely aligned with Theme 2 of the study, emphasizing the need for clarity and intentionality in expectations for successful partnerships. Following closely were

shared vision, expectations, and understandings, along with provisions for financial resources. Participants stressed the significance of shared expectations and program goals during the initiation phase, aiming for partnerships that are mutually beneficial. External corporate partnerships offering financial resources for sustained funding were highlighted, providing institutions with assurance of continued support for sustainable partnership outcomes. Additionally, financial resources offer immediate assistance to institutions, allowing targeted support such as student scholarships or acquiring new technology.

Seventy-five percent of survey respondents emphasized the importance of characteristics such as having defined decision-making structures, addressing real problems, and fostering capacity building. The emphasis on addressing real problems signifies the need for partnerships to be purposeful. While corporate partners may have their own objectives, if these objectives fail to address the genuine challenges faced by HBCUs, they may lack significance and risk being less successful. This was evident during the Black Lives Matter movement when corporations sought to support colleges financially, which was beneficial, but for many institutions, the pressing issues at the time included declining enrollment, campus infrastructure challenges, and faculty recruitment (Bunn, 2020; Stewart & Lawson, 2021; Herder, 2022). Capacity building emerged as a central theme in the study, echoing findings from the literature review about disparities needing attention and support from corporate partners. As Grace noted, "Capacity is built through the creation of partnerships" (Grace, 2002). HBCUs need rich partnerships to build upon their existing capacity and ultimately prevent them from potential dissolution and accreditation loss (Mhute, 2019; Suggs, 2019).

The additional characteristics outlined in Grace's framework, such as measurable outputs, a clear plan for continuity, acting as a catalyst for growth, and providing professional

development opportunities, were also deemed significant by half of the participants. Several participants emphasized the importance of measurable outputs in assessing progress. Just as data-driven practices are crucial, it is vital for institutions to understand the metrics and expectations placed upon them. Similarly, corporations must commit to metrics that institutions consider valuable for progress.

Having a defined method for ensuring continuity is vital for the consistency and long-term sustainability of partnerships. Consistency in corporate partnerships with HBCUs promotes trust and confidence between the partners, which cultivates a sense of reliability and dependability. Additionally, defined methods provide guidance on how partnerships can adapt to any changing circumstances, which ensures that they can be sustainable for a longer period of time.

External corporate partnerships can indeed serve as catalysts for growth for HBCUs by providing access to resources, supporting innovation and research endeavors, and enhancing student opportunities. Corporations bring financial resources, expertise, and many other assets that HBCUs often lack. Corporate partnerships can also promote innovation and research. John specifically shared his institution's experiences with engaging in research projects with corporations, which not only enhanced its academic reputation but also stimulated job creation to boost the local economy. Opportunities like these, and the many others described by participants, contribute to the creation of real-world experiences for students, connecting them to industry and preparing them for successful careers.

Finally, interviews with faculty members and those in direct student-facing roles highlighted the importance of partnerships in supporting professional development training for faculty and staff. Collaborating with external corporate partners can enhance teaching

methodologies, instructional techniques, and research skills among faculty, ultimately contributing to academic excellence and benefiting students. Access to training provided by industry leaders enables faculty and staff to stay updated on the latest trends and best practices in their respective fields, which fosters innovation and creativity by introducing new ideas and approaches to their work. Additionally, professional development opportunities offered by corporations can support HBCUs in retention efforts. While internal resources may be limited, partnering with corporations expands the institution's capacity to provide skill-building opportunities for faculty and staff, facilitating career growth, enhancing job satisfaction, and ultimately improving retention rates.

The importance of external corporate partnerships with HBCUs is further examined in this study through two conceptual frameworks: Brown, Williams, and Ester's Shared Leadership Practices and Grace's Successful Partnership Characteristics. Interview data and survey responses highlighted key themes from these frameworks as participants emphasized the significance of student-centeredness, intentional partnerships, and capacity building. Findings from the study signify the critical role that partnerships can play in addressing the unique challenges faced by HBCUs.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this dissertation research offer practical implications for potential partners and stakeholders. Actionable insights for practice emerged by exploring the lived experiences of participants. Leaders provided insights into how external corporate partners could enhance their approach to forming sustainable partnerships with HBCUs.

Participants Provide Guidelines for A Corporate Engagement Training Manual

As a part of the interview protocol's concluding question, participants were asked to answer the prompt, "If you were to write a training manual for corporate partners, what do you think is important for them to understand about forming and sustaining partnerships?" Their responses resulted in key areas that they deemed to be essential for corporate partners to understand before engaging with their institutions. Key action items from their responses included understanding the history, values, and needs of HBCUs, fostering open communication, trust, and collaboration, and ultimately contributing to the advancement and success of HBCUs. It would be beneficial for organizational leaders to have a training manual specific to their institutions for generating corporate partnerships with HBCUs. The following recommendations provide guidance on how corporate partners can forge meaningful and impactful partnerships with HBCUs, based on the lived experiences of administrative leaders within this study.

Theme 1: The Importance of Being Student-Centered When Developing Partnerships

Recommendation 1: Student-needs assessment that can be leveraged when engaging with corporate partners. HBCUs should have a clear understanding of their students' needs to foster partnerships that are centered around students. This includes maintaining accessible data to inform past trends and facilitate strategic partnership plans for the future. Such data may include metrics that are related to employment outcomes, scholarship need and distribution, and individual student needs. Additionally, integrating student feedback into this data is important to ensure alignment between the administrative perceptions of student needs and the realities that are expressed by students directly.

Theme 2: Tailored Approach - Intentional Efforts Toward Establishing Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

Recommendation 2: Corporate partners should familiarize themselves with the dynamics of HBCU students and develop strategies to support this unique student demographic, effectively. Corporate partners should approach these partnerships by having an understanding of the various types of needs that students may have that are different from those at PWIs. This can be done by understanding the history of HBCUs, actively engaging with HBCU students, conducting research and analyzing data specific to HBCU student demographics and socio-economic backgrounds, seeking feedback from HBCU students, and providing cultural competency training to employees. Additionally, corporate partners should have ideas that they can potentially implement to address those student needs, again to ensure that partnerships are truly student focused.

Recommendation 3: HBCUs should take a pan-university approach to maximizing external corporate partnerships. HBCUs should adopt a pan-university approach to maximize partnerships with corporations, ensuring comprehensive resource utilization, holistic representation of institutional offerings, and strategic alignment with university goals. By involving various departments, schools, and administrators across the institution, HBCUs can leverage diverse resources, expertise, and networks to forge impactful partnerships with corporations. This approach enables HBCUs to showcase a wide array of offerings, spanning academic programs, research capabilities, student services, and community engagement initiatives, thereby enhancing their appeal to corporate partners interested in collaboration across multiple areas. By securing leadership support and engaging stakeholders throughout the institution, HBCUs can ensure that partnership initiatives align with overarching university goals

and priorities. Additionally, centralizing partnership efforts allows HBCUs to optimize resource allocation, avoiding duplication of efforts and maximizing return on investment for both the institution and corporate partners.

Theme 3: Champions Initiate and Drive Corporate Partnerships

Recommendation 4: Institutions should pinpoint their key champions and encourage collaborative knowledge sharing among them. Each champion brings unique networks and skills to the partnership. Encouraging shared learning among key champions can expand networks and increase the HBCU's connections by cultivating stronger relationships. Collaboration within this group also facilitates knowledge exchange and the identification of best practices that can be leveraged across the institution.

Theme 4: Perspectives of How Capacity Building Impacts Partnership Results

Recommendation 5: Corporate partners and HBCU leaders should explore opportunities for direct support from corporations. HBCUs should feel empowered to request assistance from corporations, ensuring clarity on how different partners can contribute to institutional goals, particularly in areas with limited resources. There may be areas for support, unknown to corporations, where corporate leaders can leverage their expertise, such as offering resume workshops for students, providing faculty training on industry trends, or teaching courses on cutting-edge technologies.

Additional Implications for Practice

The researcher proposes further practical implications that go beyond the suggestions provided by participants. These additional recommendations stem from a synthesis of all

findings and are informed by the researcher's own experience conducting the study and working as an external relations practitioner. Key additional recommendations for practice include the importance of utilizing language or fact sheets to strengthen external partnerships, implementing succession planning to address issues arising from turnover and limited capacity, and emphasizing strategies for ensuring the sustainability and longevity of partnerships.

Language / Fact Sheets to Strengthen External Partnerships

For HBCUs to establish effective external partnerships, it's essential to utilize written materials such as language or fact sheets. These materials are customized to convey information about the HBCU's capabilities, programs, and initiatives to potential external partners. It's crucial that the language used in these materials is tailored to each HBCU, considering their unique characteristics, strengths, and priorities. Language or fact sheets serve as clear and consistent messaging tools, ensuring alignment and coherence in communications with corporate partners, thus facilitating productive collaboration. They enable HBCUs to showcase their distinct strengths, including academic programs, research endeavors, and community engagement initiatives, which can attract corporate partners interested in supporting aligned projects. By effectively communicating their value proposition, impact, and potential partnership benefits, HBCUs can enhance credibility and trustworthiness in the eyes of corporate partners, laying the groundwork for successful collaborations. Furthermore, language or fact sheets streamline the partnership development process by providing corporate partners with essential information about the institution's capabilities, resources, and strategic priorities, thereby facilitating informed decision-making and expediting partnership negotiations and establishment.

Succession Planning

Leaders in the study emphasized the challenges posed by employee turnover and the absence of succession planning, particularly regarding knowledge transfer, as highlighted in Theme 4. To address these issues, several implications for practice are proposed. Firstly, HBCUs should invest in knowledge management systems to capture and retain institutional knowledge. This involves documenting processes, best practices, and lessons learned to mitigate the impact of turnover on partnership management and ensure continuity in relationships with corporate partners. HBCUs should invest in systems like Excel spreadsheets or more advanced systems like Salesforce, to capture and preserve institutional knowledge. Additionally, cultivating relationships with corporate partners beyond individual employees is essential. Utilizing tools like LinkedIn can facilitate connections with other stakeholders within corporate organizations, reducing reliance on individual contacts and increasing partnership longevity. Moreover, HBCUs should establish comprehensive succession plans delineating key roles responsible for managing corporate partnerships, complete with clear succession pathways, training requirements, and contingency measures. By implementing these measures, HBCUs can minimize the disruption caused by turnover and maintain consistency in partnership engagement.

Longevity and Sustainability

According to the survey findings from Grace, only 43% of participants identified continuity and partnerships as catalysts for growth as essential characteristics of successful partnerships. This raises questions about the priority HBCUs place on the longevity of partnerships when initiating and sustaining them. It is crucial for HBCU leaders to emphasize the importance of partnership longevity and sustainability, as highlighted by participant Sunny, who emphasized the desire to avoid one-and-done relationships. To achieve this, HBCUs should

prioritize conversations around sustainability when establishing partnerships. Recommendations for practice include investing in relationship-building efforts. This entails dedicating time and resources to foster strong, trusting relationships with corporate partners. Strategies may involve cultivating personal connections with individuals within the organization, understanding each other's needs and priorities, and exploring additional avenues for collaboration beyond the partnership's initial objectives. For instance, expanding partnerships to include community engagement projects can strengthen relationships by fostering collaboration and building rapport beyond the partnership's original scope.

Implications for Future Research

This dissertation study delved into the relationship between external corporate partners and HBCUs, with a focus on the firsthand experiences of leaders across various sectors within the institutions. Key implications for future research highlight the importance of diversifying sampling approaches, engaging corporations to gain their perspectives, and digging deeper into the role of strategic partnership champions. Utilizing diverse approaches could provide insights from different disciplines within HBCUs, including leaders from institutional advancement, specific academic departments or colleges, career services, and potentially athletics departments. While the study incorporated viewpoints from two faculty members, one of whom served as a department chair, future research could narrow its focus to department chair positions to better understand their experiences with corporate partnerships, given their pivotal role in balancing the needs of students and faculty. Conducting research that provides insights from corporations would be invaluable for aligning study findings with the lived experiences of corporate leaders, thus enhancing understanding of their strategies and approaches towards engaging with HBCUs.

Additionally, future research could explore the role and impact of partnership champions within HBCUs, exploring how they cultivate social capital and contribute valuable insights into fostering and sustaining partnerships. Furthermore, investigating turnover rates at HBCUs could provide solutions to support these institutions, given the concerns expressed by participants regarding turnover's impact on partnership formation, sustainability, knowledge transfer, and bandwidth. Lastly, exploring challenges with succession planning further would be beneficial, as this aspect remains an area that HBCUs are actively navigating and is crucial for the longevity of partnerships, particularly with corporate funders. These implications offer valuable guidance for future studies, each contributing to a deeper understanding and more effective practice of corporate partnerships with HBCUs.

Conclusion

In the words of January, one of the participants, “I hope that this particular study helps HBCUs understand themselves… [and the] kind of the parameters [needed] for successful partnerships.”

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) serve as vital catalysts for the success of Black individuals, offering spaces for cultural identity development and equipping students with the necessary skills to become future leaders (Gasman, 2013; UNCF, n.d.; Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Ndumu & Walker, 2021). Despite historical disparities, HBCUs persist and thrive, playing a crucial role in producing many of the nation's prominent Black leaders while actively nurturing the leaders of tomorrow (Minor, 2008; Homan, 1970; Harvard Business Review, 2021). Through the lived experiences shared by participants in this study, it became evident that corporate partnerships can significantly impact the success of HBCUs, both institutionally and in terms of student achievement. Guided by Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki's (2007)

Partnership Development Model, this study uncovered administrative leaders' experiences directly related to the guiding conceptual framework. The supporting conceptual frameworks proposed by Grace (2002) and Brown, Williams, and Esters (2021) supported in identifying specific practices and characteristics for establishing and sustaining corporate partnerships, aligning closely with the study's sample population's experiences. The study's findings signify the need for practical implications for partnership stakeholders in this realm. Given the limited scholarly literature on partnership development and expansion with HBCUs, it is hoped that this study will ignite further research efforts in this area. The researcher's recommendations for future research aim to contribute to and shed continued light on the importance and impact of HBCUs. In conclusion, this study highlights the pivotal role of corporate partnerships in the success and sustainability of HBCUs while recognizing the need for continued research and support in this critical area.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

List of 4-Year Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

4-Year Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Alphabetized by state)

Institution	State
Alabama A&M University	AL
Alabama State University	AL
Bishop State Community College	AL
Miles College	AL
Oakwood University	AL
Stillman College	AL
Talladega College	AL
Tuskegee University	AL
Arkansas Baptist College	AR
Philander Smith College	AR
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff	AR
Delaware State University	DE
Howard University	DC
University of the District of Columbia (DC)	DC
Bethune-Cookman University	FL

Edward Waters College	FL
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical (A&M) University	FL
Florida Memorial University	FL
Albany State University	GA
Carver College	GA
Clark Atlanta University	GA
Fort Valley State University	GA
Interdenominational Theological Center	GA
Morehouse College	GA
Morehouse College of Medicine	GA
Morris Brown College	GA
Paine College	GA
Savannah State University	GA
Spelman College	GA
Kentucky State University	KY
Simmons College of Kentucky	KY
Dillard University	LA
Grambling State University	LA
Southern University and A&M College	LA

Southern University at New Orleans	LA
Southern University at Shreveport	LA
Xavier University of Louisiana	LA
Bowie State University	MD
Coppin State University	MD
Morgan State University	MD
University of Maryland at Eastern Shore	MD
Alcorn State	MS
Jackson State University	MS
Mississippi Valley State University	MS
Rust College	MS
Tougaloo College	MS
Harris-Stowe State University	MO
Lincoln University	MO
Barber Scotia College	NC
Bennett College*	NC
Elizabeth City State University*	NC
Fayetteville State University*	NC
Hood Theological (College) Seminary*	NC

Johnson C. Smith University*	NC
Livingstone College*	NC
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (A&T) State University*	NC
North Carolina Central University*	NC
Saint Augustine's University*	NC
Shaw University*	NC
Winston-Salem State University*	NC
Central State University	OH
Wilberforce University	OH
Langston University	OK
Cheyney University of Pennsylvania	PA
Lincoln University	PA
Allen University	SC
Benedict College	SC
Claflin University	SC
Clinton College	SC
Morris College	SC
South Carolina State University	SC
Voorhees College	SC

American Baptist College	TN
Fisk University	TN
Knoxville College	TN
Lane College	TN
LeMoyne-Owen College	TN
Meharry Medical College	TN
Tennessee State University	TN
Huston-Tillotson University	TX
Jarvis Christian College	TX
Paul Quinn College	TX
Prairie View A&M University	TX
Southwestern Christian College	TX
Texas College	TX
Texas Southern University	TX
Wiley College	TX
University of the Virgin Islands	USVI
Hampton University	VA
Norfolk State University	VA
Virginia State University	VA

Virginia Union University	VA
Virginia University of Lynchburg	VA
Bluefield State College	WV
West Virginia State University	WV

Note. List of HBCUs from Esters, L.T., & Gasman, M. (2024). HBCU: The Power of Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

*HBCUs that will make up the sample for this study.

APPENDIX B

Participant Recruitment Email

Hello _____,

My name is Cherrelle Lawrence, and I am a doctoral student at North Carolina State University, working toward my Ed.D. in Community College Leadership. As part of my graduation requirements, I am currently working on my dissertation, which is titled: *Strengthening HBCU Partnerships: A Narrative Inquiry Study of HBCU Leaders' Collaboration with External Corporate Partners*, under the direction of my committee chair, Dr. Carrol Warren.

In order to fulfill requirements for my dissertation, I am conducting a study of Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU) administrative leaders and those responsible for partnership development, who have collaborated with corporations. I am particularly seeking to learn more about partnerships that have been an effort to support, develop, and enhance the institution.

My findings will be presented as emerging patterns and themes in a narrative format which may include direct quotes, but your identity and the identity of your employing institution will be protected by pseudonyms of your choosing.

I am asking participants who are interested in being a part of this study to take 5 minutes to fill out this participant interest pre-screening form - (*Qualtrics link here*). This information will help me frame the population of this study. Once the pre-screening form has been completed, I will then contact 8-10 participants for a 60-90 minute recorded Zoom interview on a day and time that works best for you.

If you have any questions about the study before finalizing your interest, please feel free to contact me at [redacted].

I look forward to potentially working with you and hearing about your experiences!

Thank you,
Cherrelle

Cherrelle Lawrence, MBA
Graduate Student - Community College Leadership
North Carolina State University

APPENDIX C

Participant Interest Screening and Scheduling Form

Start of Block: Opening

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study about Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU) administrative leaders who have collaborated with external corporate partners.

To ensure your responses remain confidential, please only access this survey when you are in a private location, such as your home, on a private internet connection with your browser in private or incognito mode. Your responses will remain confidential and will not be shared. This survey should take no more than seven minutes of your time.

Q1 Please enter the name of your institution.

_____

Q2 Please enter your current title / role.

_____

Q3 During your current tenure, have you been involved in facilitating, leading, and/or establishing external corporate partnerships for your institution?

- **o Yes (1)**
- **o No (2)**

Skip To: Q34 If During your current tenure, have you been involved in facilitating, leading, and/or establishing... = No

Skip To: Q4 If During your current tenure, have you been involved in facilitating, leading, and/or establishing... = Yes

Q34 Would you be willing to share the name and email of a colleague who has been involved in facilitating, leading, and/or establishing external corporate partnership(s) at your institution?

- **o Yes (1)**
- **o No (2)**

Skip To: End of Survey If Would you be willing to share the name and email of a colleague who has been involved in facilitating, leading, and/or establishing external corporate partnership(s) at your institution?. = No

Display This Question:

If Would you be willing to share the name and email of a colleague who has been involved in facilitating, leading, and/or establishing external corporate partnership(s) at your institution? = Yes

Q35 Please enter the name and email address of a colleague who has been involved in facilitating, leading, and/or establishing external corporate partnership(s) at your institution?

_____

_____

_____

Skip To: End of Survey If Condition: Please enter the name and e... Is Empty. Skip To: End of Survey.

Skip To: End of Survey If Condition: Please enter the name and e... Is Not Empty. Skip To: End of Survey.

Q4 Would you be interested in participating in a virtual interview which will help inform my research on HBCU administrative leaders who have collaborated with external corporate partners. *The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes and your identity will remain confidential.*

o Yes (1)

o No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Would you be interested in participating in a virtual interview which will help inform my research... = No

End of Block: Opening

Start of Block: Consent

Q19 To proceed, please read the consent form. After the consent form, you will be asked to fill out a few demographic questions and two questions about your experience with partnerships. From there, you will be routed to a space where you can schedule your interview. You can stop at any time for any reason by closing your browser. If you have questions about this study, please contact the student researcher, Cherrelle Lawrence at [redacted] and [redacted]. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Carrol Warren, at [redacted] and [redacted]. Please refer to protocol number [redacted] when contacting anyone about this study.

Q22 Please select your response to the consent form.

- **o Yes, I want to be in this research study. (2)**
- **o No, I do not want to be in this research study. (1)**

Skip To: End of Survey If Please select your response to the consent form. = No, I do not want to be in this research study.

End of Block: Consent

Start of Block: Demographic

Q8 The following questions collect demographic information.

Q7 Please indicate your Race/Ethnicity

- ☐ **American Indian or Alaska Native**
- ☐ **Asian**
- ☐ **Black or African American**
- ☐ **Hispanic or Latino**
- ☐ **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander**

☐ **White**

Q5 Please indicate your Gender Identity

_____

Q6 Age Range

- **o 18 - 24 years old (1)**
- **o 25 - 34 years old (2)**
- **o 35 - 44 years old (3)**
- **o 45 - 54 years old (4)**
- **o 55 - 64 years old (5)**
- **o 65 - 74 years old (6)**
- **o 75 years and older (7)**

Q8 Are you a first generation college graduate?

- **o Yes (1)**
- **o No (2)**

Q9 Please indicate your highest education level achieved

- **o High School Diploma or Equivalent (1)**
- **o Bachelor's Degree (2)**
- **o Master's Degree (3)**
- **o Post-Graduate Certificate (4)**
- **o Doctoral Degree (5)**

Q10 Please indicate the number of year's experience in your professional career.

_____

Q11 How many years have you been employed with your current institution?

_____

End of Block: Demographic

Start of Block: Relative to the Study

Q36 Brown, Williams & Esters' (2021) Shared Leadership Practices will be a conceptual framework for this study.

Background: In 2021, a research study conducted at Rutgers University involved interviews with HBCU presidents regarding partnership development. The study identified five common practices for developing partnerships.

Are any of these common practices applicable to your experience in cultivating partnerships at your institution? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ **Prioritization**
- ☐ **Being student-centered**
- ☐ **Being data-driven**
- ☐ **Collaboration**
- ☐ **Innovation**

Q37 Grace's Characteristics for Successful Partnerships will also serve as a conceptual framework for this study.

Background: Grace (2002) derived these characteristics based on outcomes from four higher education studies.

In your professional experience, which of these characteristics do you believe most accurately reflects successful partnerships? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ **A shared vision, expectations, and understandings**
- ☐ **Clearly defined and owned goals and responsibilities**
- ☐ **Focus on real problems**
- ☐ **A defined structure for making decisions among the partner institutions and those who represent the institutions**
- ☐ **A defined method for ensuring continuity among partnership personnel**
- ☐ **Measurable outputs by which to evaluate progress**

- ☐ **Capacity building**
- ☐ **Catalyst and growth effects**
- ☐ **Provision of financial resources and leveraged seed money to encourage ongoing funding**
- ☐ **Availability of professional development training**

End of Block: Relative to the Study

Start of Block: Interview Scheduling

Q1 Thank you for agreeing to participate in a semi-structured, audio and video recorded interview with me via Zoom for research purposes.

Q33 Please list up to 10 dates and times in which you are available, from 8am - 8pm. Interviews will take 60-90 minutes. Please rank your availability (best option first). ***[Anytime between today and February 15]***

	Enter Date & Time (4)
Preference 1 (1)	
Preference 2 (2)	
Preference 3 (3)	
Preference 4 (4)	
Preference 5 (5)	
Preference 6 (6)	
Preference 7 (7)	
Preference 8 (8)	
Preference 9 (9)	
Preference 10 (10)	

Q3 Please list a non-work-related email address where you would like me to confirm your interview date and time. This will allow us to move forward with removing identifiers connecting your participation to your respective institution.

_____

Q6 You will receive an email response confirming your interview date and time, as well as a virtual meeting link and details that will be used for your interview. Thank you!

End of Block: Interview Scheduling

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Strengthening HBCU Partnerships: A Narrative Inquiry Study of HBCU Leaders' Collaboration with External Corporate Partners (eIRB 26730)
Principal Investigator(s): Cherrelle Lawrence, [redacted], [redacted]
Funding Source: None
NC State Faculty Point of Contact: Dr. Carrol Warren

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are invited to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, and to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) collaboration with external corporate partners, from the perspective of administrative leaders. This study will be conducted through semi-structured interviews.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate.

Specific details about the research in which you are invited to participate are contained below. If you do not understand something in this form, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If, at any time, you have questions about your participation in this research, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office. The IRB office's contact information is listed in the *What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?* section of this form.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences and expectations of administrative leaders at Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) who have collaborated with external corporate partners.

How many people will be in the study?
There will be approximately 6-12 participants in this study.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?
In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study, be currently employed at a Historically Black College & University (HBCU), serve in an administrative leadership position, and have experience working with an external corporate partner. You cannot participate in this study if you do not meet the inclusion criteria.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview in which you will recount your expectations and experiences of engagement and partnership development with an external partner. The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study is

approximately 60-90 minutes for one interview and approximately 30-45 minutes reviewing a transcript of the interview for accuracy.

Recording and images

If you want to participate in this research, you must agree to be audio and video recorded. If you do not agree to be audio and video recorded, you cannot participate in this research.

Risks and benefits

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research.

Right to withdraw your participation

You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. To do so, just stop any research activity that you are doing or contact the researcher, Cherrelle Lawrence, at [redacted]. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Carrol Warren, at [redacted]. If you choose to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in this research, you can expect that the researcher(s) will redact your data from their data set, securely destroy your data, and prevent future uses of your data for research purposes wherever possible. This is possible in some, but not all, cases.

Confidentiality, personal privacy, and data management

Trust is the foundation of the participant/researcher relationship. Much of that principle of trust is tied to keeping your information private and in the manner that I have described to you in this form. The information that you share with me will be held in confidence to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Protecting your privacy as related to this research is of utmost importance to me. There are very rare circumstances related to confidentiality where I may have to share information about you. Your information collected in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety. In other cases, I must report instances in which imminent harm could come to you or others.

How I manage, protect, and share your data are the principal ways that I protect your personal privacy. Data that will be shared with others about you will be de-identified and re-identifiable. De-identified. De-identified data is information that at one time can directly identify you, but I will record this data so that your identity will be separated from the data. I will have a master list with your code and real name that I can use to link to your data when research concludes, there will be no way your real identity will be linked to the data I publish.

Re-identifiable. Re-identifiable data is information that can identify you indirectly because of my or access to information, role, skills, combination of information, and/or use of technology. This may also mean that in published reports others could identify you from what is reported, for example, if a story you tell is very specific. If your data is re-identifiable, I will report it in such a way that you are not directly identified in reports. Based on how I need to share the data, I cannot remove details from the report that would protect your identity from ever being figured

out. This means that others may be able to re-identify from the information reported from this research.

Future use of your research data
Your information, even with identifiers removed, will not be stored, or distributed for future research studies.

Compensation
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

What if you are an employee?
Your participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Cherrelle Lawrence, at [redacted]. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Carrol Warren, at [redacted].

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State University IRB office at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out a confidential form online at https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/

Consent to participate.
By signing this consent form, I am affirming that I have read and understand the above information. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

- Yes, I want to be in this research study.
  Name: _____
  Today's Date: _____
- No, I do not want to be in this research study.

Thank you for your consideration.

APPENDIX E

Participant Email Confirmation

Hello (Participant's Name),

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your participation in this study will help me fulfill requirements for my dissertation, which is a study of Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) administrative leaders who have collaborated with external corporate partners.

Confirmation & Meeting Information

This email serves as confirmation of your participation in the study. Your interview for this study is scheduled for **DATE, TIME**. *As a reminder, we will need approximately 60-90 minutes to complete this interview.*

Meeting Link Details: (Copied from Zoom)
Meeting Password: (Copied from Zoom)
If this date and time no longer work for you, please let me know as soon as possible, so that I can reschedule our interview.

Participation

Per your signed consent form (attached), if you are no longer interested in participating in the study, please contact me or my faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Carrol Warren, at [redacted].

I look forward to learning from you during our upcoming interview. If you have any questions, please let me know.

My best,
-Cherrelle

Cherrelle Lawrence, MBA
Graduate Student - Community College Leadership
North Carolina State University

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol

[Prior to the start of recording]
"As previously mentioned, we will be using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. What first name pseudonym would you like me to use during this interview and during any future communications with you?"

First Name Pseudonym: _____

"What pseudonym would you like to use for your institution?"

Institution Pseudonym: _____

[Recording starts]

Date / Time Started: _____

"Hello. Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this interview. As stated on the pre-screening form you filled out, the purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) collaboration with external corporate partners, from the perspective of administrative leaders."

"I would like to review an informed consent form with you to remind you that this interview is being both audio and video recorded, and there are no risks or benefits to participating in this interview. Your name and the name of your employer will be identified through pseudonyms of your choosing through the entire process. I am the only person with access to these recordings and transcripts that will be produced from the recordings."

"You may withdraw your participation from this study at any time." [Await response, if any]

"Please indicate yes or no, that you verbally acknowledge that you received the informed consent and agree to continue." [Wait for confirmation] "Thank you."

"This will take approximately 60-90 minutes and we will get started in just a minute."

"Do you have any questions before we get started?" (Address questions, if needed.)

"Do you agree to continue?" (Move into interview questions.)

<u>Interview Questions</u>
"During this interview, we will alternate between discussing questions related to a specific corporate partnership of your choice and addressing questions pertaining to corporate partnerships in general at your institution."

Interview questions based on Amey, Eddy, Ozaki (2007) Partnership Development Model and questions adapted from questions related to key components of the model (Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki (2007, pp. 10-12).

Question	***Follow-Up / Prompt***
HBCU Significance	
What prompted your interest in working at an HBCU?	● *Are there any specific reasons you work at [HBCU pseudonym]*
Describing an HBCU-Corporate Partnership	
What type of corporate partnerships (i.e., industry-university) do you have across your institution?	● *Why do you think corporate partnerships are important for your institution?*
In your initial screening survey, you indicated that [refer to Grace's successful partnership characteristics question responses] ___ were characteristics that most accurately reflect successful partnerships.	● *Tell me more about why these practices are important.*
Think of a corporate partnership you have been a part of at your institution. Please describe that corporate partnership.	● *Who were/are the partners?* ● *What were/are the areas of focus of the corporate partnership?* ● *What was/is the nature of the corporate partnership (i.e., chief activities)?* ● *What was/are the goals of the corporate partnership?* ● *How was/is the corporate partnership financially supported?*
Antecedents	
Tell me about how that corporate partnership and collaboration was developed.	● *How did the corporate partnership come about?* ● *Who initiated the corporate partnership?* ● *Was there an intermediary who initially facilitated the corporate partnership (e.g., a local economic development agency)?*
What factors do administrators at your institution consider when determining whether to enter into partnerships with a corporation?	● *Please specify any factors that are taken into consideration*

Did your corporate partner have a relationship (e.g., previous corporate partnerships) with individuals or units at your college prior to this corporate partnership?	
Was there any individual, a program champion, who utilized their relationships, networks, or resources to develop the corporate partnership?	● *Is this program champion in a formal leadership position?* ● *What about this program champion allowed them to make this corporate partnership occur?* ● *How did they advocate for the corporate partnership and its goals?*
What about being an HBCU influenced the development of this corporate partnership?	
In your initial screening survey, you indicated that [refer to Shared Leadership Practices question responses] ____ are common practices applicable to your experience in cultivating corporate partnerships at your institution.	● *Tell me more about why these practices are important to corporate partnerships.*
How did you and your corporate partner decide on the roles and expectations of the relationship?	
Context	
Were there state, federal, or institutional policies, grants, or other opportunities that led to the development of the corporate partnership?	● *Are there any other external policies or regulations that led to the formation of the corporate partnership?* ● *What economic, political, or socio-cultural factors influenced the development of the corporate partnership (e.g., community needs, grant fund initiatives, etc.)?* ● *What internal policies or organizational structures associated with your institution led to the formation of the corporate partnership?*
Motivations	
What do you think was the motive for the industry partner to join the corporate	● *What was the motive for your college to join the corporate partnership?*

partnership?	• *How are the motivations tied to your college's mission?*
Do you think the benefits partners sought from establishing the relationship were realized?	• *Were there individuals who benefited from the corporate partnership? Why?*
Reflecting on this corporate partnership experience and others, why are corporations interested in partnering with HBCUs, in general, and your institution, in particular?	• *How do the motives for corporations' interest in partnering with HBCUs impact the nature and effectiveness of the partnership?*
Were there individuals who became less active or left the corporate partnership?	• *Why?*
Partnership / Feedback Loop / Outcomes	
Who leads the corporate partnership?	• *What is their title/area of work at the institution?*
What is the level of involvement of the university?	• *Of the partner (e.g., advisory or hands-on)?*
What are the outcomes of the corporate partnership?	• *Are the outcomes for the partner the same as those for the institution? Please explain.*
How did/do/ will you know that the corporate partnership was/is successful?	• *What factors contributed to or undermined the success of the corporate partnership?*
What types of data were gathered to measure the effects of the corporate partnership process?	• *Were there any unanticipated effects associated with the corporate partnership?*
Did the goals or activities change over time?	• *If so, why?*
How did/do you receive ongoing feedback about how the corporate partnership is working?	
Dissolution / Sustainability	
Did the corporate partnership end? Why?	• *If not, what is the current state of the partnership? (If unclear)* • *If yes, why?* ○ *Did it end before or after the goals or objectives were achieved?*

	○ *Was it by mutual consent?* ○ *Did the corporate partnership end because of differences in values or workstyles between the partners?*
General Corporate Partnerships - Context / Partnerships / Outcomes	
Reflecting on this corporate partnership experience as well as others, what would you have done differently to improve the process for forming or sustaining the partnership?	● *Managing power dynamics?* ● *Achieving the institution's goals?*
What challenges have you faced with maintaining corporate partnerships?	● Can you share an example of a specific challenge?
What external factors (e.g. sociocultural and political) facilitate or impede corporate partnerships' development, effectiveness and sustainability at your institution?	●
Why do you think corporations do not pursue more partnerships with HBCUs?	●
Think about a successful corporate partnership. Why was it successful?	●
Based on your experiences, what would an ideal corporate partnership look like for your institution?	● What factors prevent HBCUs from having the ideal corporate partnerships you described? ● Do you think the ideal characteristics of corporate partners depend on the type of university, in particular, HBCUs vs PWIs?
If you were to write a training manual about corporate partnerships, what do you think is important for industry/corporations to understand about forming and sustaining corporate partnerships with HBCUs?	

APPENDIX G

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Date: January 17, 2024
Study Title: Strengthening HBCU Partnerships: A Narrative Inquiry Study of HBCU Leaders and Collaboration with External Partners
NC State eIRB #: 26730
Funding Source: N/A

Dear Carrol Adams Warren,

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved on January 17, 2024, as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exempt d.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

This approval for this research study does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation in accordance with the NC State university regulation and IRB unit standards.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NC State University projects, the assurance number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation in accordance with the NC State university regulation and IRB unit standards.
3. If any problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.
4. For information regarding study closure or post approval monitoring activities, please refer to the NC State University IRB website.

To request an official, signed approval letter on NC State letterhead, please submit a request on our website under “Request a Letter”

Sincerely,

Jennie Ofstein, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board (IRB) Director
North Carolina State University
[redacted]