ABSTRACT

POLK, TIFFANI MARSHALL. Partnering with Predominantly Black Community Colleges: A Narrative Inquiry. (Under the direction of Dr. Carrol L. Warren).

Community college students often require additional support along their educational pathways, necessitating partnerships with external entities sharing the institution's vision for student access and success. Despite being vital to student outcomes, partnerships involving Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCUs) and Predominantly Black Community Colleges (PBCCs) remain under-researched, often leaving these institutions excluded from initiatives to improve student success. Additionally, HBCCs and PBCCs face funding challenges, particularly in regions with a history of racial inequity, such as The South. Following the murder of George Floyd, philanthropic efforts surged toward social justice causes, prompting a racial reckoning across various sectors, including higher education. However, recent anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) legislation threatens progress toward racial equity, jeopardizing funding for institutions prioritizing DEI initiatives. Against this backdrop, the study underscores the critical importance of partnerships aligned with institutional values, student needs, and visionary leadership. By fostering collaboration, partnerships can enhance student success, workforce readiness, and community impact. This dissertation explores the experiences of institutional leaders in collaboration with external partners, aiming to identify pathways for meaningful connections with institutions serving historically marginalized student populations.

Keywords: HBCC, PBCC, Historically Black community colleges, predominantly Black community colleges, predominantly Black institutions, community college, partnerships, student success, diversity, equity, inclusion, leadership

© Copyright 2024 by Tiffani M. Polk

All Rights Reserved

Partnering with Predominantly Black Community Colleges: A Narrative Inquiry

By
Tiffani M. Polk

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Adult and Community College Education

Raleigh, North Carolina
2024

APPROVED BY:

_____	_____
Dr. Carrol Warren Committee Chair	Dr. Melvin “Jai” Jackson
_____	_____
Dr. Pamela Senegal.	Dr. Rolanda Mitchell

DEDICATION

“I am my ancestors’ wildest dream.” - Brandan Odums

This work is dedicated to my loving grandparents, Mack and Virginia Timberlake. "The sacrifices I made could never compare to the sacrifices you both made to ensure all eight of your children had the opportunity to pursue a college education. You both knew the transformative power of education and I am forever grateful for all the years you've supported me, prayed for me, laughed with me, and loved me. Without your guidance, I would not have made it this far. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

To my honey, Robert, My Superman: Knowing that God put you on this earth just for me is so overwhelming. Thank you for your support, patience, and understanding on this journey and throughout our relationship. Thank you for the Hulk Hogan three-count when I was feeling too tired to continue. Thank you for distracting me with a Cosmo or a margarita from time to time. I love you more than the space I have here to share. It’s only up from here, babe.

Mama, you continue to be one of my greatest inspirations. Your love, encouragement, and sacrifices have been the cornerstone of my life. Your support and belief in my abilities have been my guiding light, inspiring me to persevere through challenges and strive for excellence. You taught me to be resilient and to find inspiration in God and my family. Thank you, Mommy. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

To my girl, Cherrelle: Thank you for sharing this experience with me. Over the last couple of years, so much has changed, but our friendship has stood the test. Despite the time or the distance, I could always count on you to be there—always listening, always encouraging, always a safe place. Thank you for the late-night writing sessions, the dissertation playlist, the dreaming, the crying, and the laughing. In you, I found a friend and a sister for life!

God, on the days I thought I would lose my mind, you held me. You carried me through each valley, every time. You’ve been so faithful! Thank you for every view from the mountaintops. The journey is always worth it. I will always sing this anthem: “*You are more than able. Who am I to deny what the Lord can do?” - Maverick City Music*

BIOGRAPHY

Tiffani M. Polk is a student affairs professional with over ten years of experience in education. She has developed a passion for guiding adult learners through their educational journey from enrollment to completion. Tiffani holds a bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a master's degree in Adult Education with a concentration in Student Affairs in Higher Education from East Carolina University, and a doctorate in Community College Leadership from North Carolina State University.

Tiffani M. Polk is a native of rural North Carolina. Drawing from her experiences as a first-generation undergraduate in a predominantly white institution, she channeled her passion into serving minority students, particularly those facing barriers to employment and hailing from low socioeconomic backgrounds. She recognizes the pivotal role that support, connection, and representation play in African American students' success.

In her current role as CTE manager at Dallas College, Tiffani continues her mission of providing comprehensive support services to students, which leads to increased enrollment, retention, completion, and job placement in high-demand technical careers. Her dedication to empowering students and her commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion motivate her aspirations for advancing into leadership roles within the community college system.

Tiffani cherishes life with her husband, Robert, and their fur baby, Snoop.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Warren, I am so blessed to have you as my chair. The time, dedication, care, encouragement, and love you shared have been more than I ever expected in this process. I hope I know you and continue to be a part of your life forever! I know you have many students you love, but I like to think I'm your favorite.

I have an amazing tribe of friends, family, and mentors, some living and some who have joined that great cloud of witnesses in Heaven, who have played an essential part in the story of my life. I cannot even begin to list you all. From the bottom of my heart, thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

Since 1901, community colleges have served the vital purpose of workforce development and further academic preparatory studies. Community colleges "boost educational attainment and earnings on average" (Mountjoy, 2022, p. 2583). Community colleges serve almost 9 million students with agility (Community College Research Center, 2023). Though community colleges successfully catalyze students to further their education, credential attainment, and job opportunities, students of color, particularly Black students, lag behind their counterparts (Weismann, 2022). Historically, Black people were excluded from education or relegated to subpar education. This form of racial discrimination and educational segregation created the systemic inequities we observe today at all levels of the educational system (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

In 1849, Avery College was the first Historically Black Community College (HBCC) formed (Elliot et al., 2019). Although Avery College, along with 24 other HBCCs, has closed, 12 HBCCs exist today, and many more predominantly Black community colleges (PBCCs) have been recognized by Congress since 2007 (Prueter, 2019). HBCCs and PBCCs outperform their counterparts regarding Black students' graduation rates, transfer rates, and individual student outcomes (Bailey et al., 2006). Since there is a real need to understand how to support Black students within community colleges better, this study explored the lived experiences of institutional leaders through a narrative inquiry within historically Black and predominantly Black community colleges that have collaborated with external education partners to support, develop, and enhance equitable pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes. This study sought to examine the experiences of leaders after the murder of George Floyd and

the accompanying racial equity movement, which prompted a “racial awakening” across sectors of higher education and service-oriented industries.

Background

Community colleges play a crucial role in American higher education but receive much less funding than four-year universities. Community colleges offer an essential pathway to a four-year degree and career training while disproportionately serving low-income students and students of color. Community colleges are one of the most accessible and vital roads to social mobility and economic mobility in the United States. However, “community colleges receive $8,800 less in education revenue per student enrolled than four-year institutions, which translates into a total gap of $78 billion between the two sectors” (Yuen, 2020, para. 2). The resources available at an institution have a significant impact on the success of its students. However, lower funding means community colleges have less money to spend on things like faculty, advising services, emergency aid, and more (Yuen, 2020). Community college students need more support than students attending four-year universities as many are first-generation students, single parents, and food or housing insecure (Marcus, 2023).

“Better resourced institutions have higher retention and attainment rates, among Black and Latinx students, in particular” (Edgecomb, 2023, para. 1). However, enrollment of Black students is quickly decreasing, and “one root cause stands out: community college funding is largely inadequate, inequitable, and has not kept pace with the needs of students or institutions” (Shaw et al., 2023, p. I). As more and more states move to performance-based funding models, it is critical to examine how this model affects student enrollment and overall success. It is important to note that some institutions may provide additional funds specifically for low-income, underrepresented minority, or adult students. However, it is not well known how

effectively these programs provide the necessary financial support for these students to succeed academically. (Kelchen, 2019). Performance-based funding does not consider the community college's need for or effectiveness of providing support outside of the classroom, significantly contributing to student success. Traditional measures do not adequately measure how community colleges serve their students. Therefore, funding does not keep up with institutional or student needs (St. Amour, 2020).

In 2008, the U.S. Congress recognized Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs). It incorporated them in the Higher Education Act of 2008, allowing them to apply for more federal funding to serve their majority populations of low-income Black students (Jones, 2019). PBIs provide access for Black students to higher education they may not otherwise access. In 2023, there were 71 recognized PBIs; of those PBIs recognized within higher education, 69% (*n*=49) are Predominantly Black Community Colleges (PBCCs) and are located in The South (Jones, 2019; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2023; Complete College America, 2022). The era of Jim Crow segregation still affects higher education in The South today. Black students have lower graduation rates than White students and the highest dropout and lowest completion rates (Community College Research Center, 2021; Espinoza et al., 2019). This research study highlights the importance of understanding how The South has shaped the identity of many Black Americans to truly unpack what it means for Black socioeconomic and educational success. As federal and state funding for higher education continues to diminish, the role of philanthropy is crucial in ensuring Black students have the support they need to be successful.

Problem Statement

Community college students need support while taking their journey along educational pathways; institutions may not be able to provide the support necessary without additional

partners who share in their vision to provide adequate access for students to services and instruction. Palmore (2023) and Arney (2010) consider partnerships as "mission critical" and assert that they are one of the most effective strategies to achieve the comprehensive goals of community colleges in an environment of budget constraints. Predominantly Black institutions serve some of the most vulnerable students but are an under researched population, often left out of initiatives to increase student success (Complete College American; 2021, Duncan, 2021). HBCCs and PBCCs are in a unique position to affect the low credential attainment of Black Americans but still face a significant challenge with funding (Gasman, 2013).

The South, a region known for its history of racial inequity, holds more than half of the HBCCs and PBCCs. Philanthropic funding often overlooks educational institutions in The South, and universities tend to outpace community colleges in endowment fundraising, as Mitchell (2021) and MacArthur (2000) reported. Like the rest of the country, Southern states have been decreasing high education spending disproportionately, making it even more difficult for poor, undereducated people to access higher education (Pratt, 2016). The South is home to community college tuition rates that equal almost half of the family incomes (Institute for Research on Higher Education, 2016). Without access to affordable education, the region’s economy will suffer, further entrenching poverty (Pratt, 2016). If research does not explore the experiences of institutional leaders within HBCCs and PBCCs in collaboration with external educational partners, potential partners and philanthropists may not be able to identify pathways to connect with the institutions that serve this historically marginalized group of students.

Purpose

More research is needed on the experiences of executive leaders in HBCCs and PBCCs participation with external education partners as HBCCs are an understudied entity, and PBCC is

a new institution designation (Elliot et al., 2019; Jones, 2019). These institutions play a significant role in creating equitable economic opportunities for Black students. The need for more equitable pathways to credential attainment and employment opportunities has only become more apparent and urgent on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic (Schmoke and Scott, 2022). HBCCs and PBCCs have a high enrollment of first-generation Black students who attended secondary schools with a majority Black population. The environment at these institutions fosters a sense of belonging that is critical to their success (Knox, 2022; Brooms, 2019). Elliot et al.'s (2019) research suggests that HBCC and PBCC graduation and transfer rates are on par with, if not better than, other community colleges. With the long-standing educational, social, and economic inequities Black students face, there needs to be a greater understanding of what makes HBCCs and PBCCs successful in serving Black students (Weissman, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of HBCC and PBCC leaders in The South regarding their partnership development with external education organizations.

Significance of Study

On May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, police officers murdered George Floyd. The convenience store manager accused Floyd of using a counterfeit $20 bill. When approached by the police while sitting in his vehicle, George Floyd refused to exit his vehicle based on fear that he may be shot like other Black men in recent altercations with police. The police eventually handcuffed him and placed him in a police vehicle (Dixon and Dundes, 2020). George Floyd, who explained that he had the COVID-19 virus, complained about breathing difficulties (Bailey, 2020). The officers removed him from the car and placed him on the ground, where Derek Chauvin kneeled on George Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds (Levenson, 2021). As a

result, George Floyd died. A bystander caught the murder on camera, and images of a man pleading for his life flooded multiple media channels. Due to the stillness in the world caused by COVID-19 restrictions, the outrage and protests were as widespread as those seen in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement (Alexander, 2000).

George Floyd's death sparked a "racial awakening" to the systemic inequities against Black Americans. Millions of philanthropic dollars began pouring into causes around social justice, racial equality, and criminal justice reform (Kumah-Abiwu, 2022; Rodriguez and Escobar, 2023). His death was viewed as an "inflection point in a modern Civil Rights Movement" similar to that of Emmett Till (Levitz et al., 2020). Colorblind racism, which was once considered a thing of the past, has proven to be alive and well (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Prior to this, institutions of higher education focused messaging around diversity and inclusion with not much emphasis on race (Berry, 2011). People painted responses to racial injustice as personal problems rather than addressing them as systemic issues. A study by Toraif et al. (2023) found that after the murder of George Floyd, institutions of higher education were much more purposeful in calling out systemic racism and racial injustice, acknowledging its prevalence in our society, and uplifting slavery and segregation as direct precipitating events.

In corporate America, companies from "Silicon Valley to Wall Street pledged to take an active role in confronting systemic racism" by promising $50 billion to the cause (Jan et al., 2021). However, the road to racial equity is a long one. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts have already started to wane. Corporate America is pulling back on roles that focus on DEI within its organizations just three years later (Ceron and Rupp, 2023). Many companies blame the economy, but critics argue that the commitment was not honest from the beginning,

that the agenda became “too Black,” or that there was a misalignment with political interests (Harper, 2023; Gonzalez, 2023).

Now, the attack on DEI has reached higher education again. As of July 2023, 7 states have passed anti-DEI laws restricting DEI offices and staff operation, mandatory DEI training, diversity statement use, and identity-based hiring and admissions (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2023). Threats to progress toward racial equity are arising. Anti-DEI legislation severely limits historically underrepresented students' pathways to higher education (Nellums, 2023). With laws in place to withhold funding from institutions of higher education that continue to operate DEI offices and practices, HBCCs and PBCCs have the potential to end up with even less funding than the inequitable funds they currently receive (Elliot et al., 2019).

Research Question

This study employed narrative inquiry to explore the lived experiences of institutional leaders within historically Black and predominantly Black community colleges who have collaborated with external education partners. The following research question guided this inquiry:

What are the lived experiences of institutional leaders within historically Black and predominantly Black community colleges who have collaborated with external education partners to support, develop, and enhance equitable pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes?

Definition of Terms

Community College: an institution that typically offers associate degrees, vocational training, and certificate programs, often serving local communities by providing accessible and affordable higher education options.

Historically Black Community College: a two-year institution established before the 1964 Civil Rights Act with a historical mission of serving Black students (Complete College America, 2022)

Predominantly Black Community College: a two-year institution with at least 1,000 undergraduate students; an undergraduate enrollment that is at least 50% low-income or first-generation; an undergraduate enrollment that is at least 50% degree-seeking; a low expenditure per full-time undergraduate student in comparison with other institutions offering similar instruction; and at least 40% of enrolled students identifying as Black Americans (Higher Education Act, 2008)

External education partner: an organization, entity, grantmaker, or philanthropist that assist institutions of higher education with gaining additional resources to increase educational opportunities and outcomes for students (Brown et al., 2021)

Systemic racism: racial discrimination and differential treatment based on racial hierarchies embedded within social, political, economic, and cultural institutions in the United States (Toraif et al., 2023)

Racial equity: a critical examination of whiteness within educational institutions and practices, the acknowledgement and dismantling of racism in educational systems, and an achievement of racial proportionality in all educational outcomes

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)

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this qualitative study relied upon Omi and Winant's (2015) Racial Formation Theory (RFT). Omi and Winant theorize that race shapes and is shaped by social structures. *Race* is a social construct rooted in history and changes over time. RFT conceptualizes what race is, how it is formed, and how it interacts with society in the United States. RFT is complex because it goes beyond simply explaining race but synthesizes theories, historical perspectives, sociological insights, and political considerations that inform how race is constructed. The theory asserts that race is not a fixed biological classification but is socially constructed and dependent on historical developments.

Additionally, RFT highlights the significance of individuals and communities challenging established racial categories and identities and the political contention around the challenges (Toraif, 2023). When applied to this study, the theory provided flexibility in that it helped address the intricate, dynamic, and sometimes conflicting aspects of race. Initially published in 1994, Omi and Winant have demonstrated the flexibility of RFT by reshaping it in multiple new editions as societal influences evolve through the years.

Race goes beyond what is understood through ethnicity, class, or nationality. Ethnicity-based theories of race often adopted the immigrant analogy, "the assumption that racially identified individuals and groups, like immigrants, could adapt to new circumstances" and assimilate into the broader, dominant (i.e., White) community, making race a nonfactor (Omi and Winant, 2015, p. 40). This thinking is flawed because race has been more significant than ethnicity in defining a person in U.S. society. Omi and Winant explain that "being "ethnic" turns out to be about whether and how much an individual or group can assimilate into or hybridize

with whiteness. Being “racial” is about how much difference there is between an individual or a group and their white counterparts” (p. 46).

Class-based theories of race rely on interpretations of race and racism as “racial inequality as a consequence of economic relationships” and class as a more fundamental social category than race (Omi and Winant, 2015, p. 40). Logically, people may think that class affects social inequality over race, as if race is secondary to class. Two people of the same class should enjoy the same privileges in the United States regardless of race. However, Omi and Winant (2015) argued that “Politics, culture, and many other social factors shape economic life as much as they are shaped by it; these are all eminently racial matters” (p. 11-12).

Theories of race based on nationality emphasize the significance of "peoplehood" (Omi and Winant, 2015, p. 12), linked to particular nation-states and territories. Throughout history, these designations emerged through imperial or colonial activities, where the acquisition of territories required the marginalization or "othering" of the inhabitants by the imperialists or colonizers. Omi and Winant (2015) argue that interpreting race as a simple variety of “peoplehood” is an oversimplification of race:

> While the nation-based paradigm supplies a valuable concept—peoplehood—to the overall corpus of racial theory, it is still reductionist vis-à-vis race. Nation-based theories treat race as a mere manifestation of the presumptively more profound concept of “the nation” and project “internal” colonial relations of domination and resistance forward into the present (p. 12).

Throughout history, the United States has deeply entrenched race as a fundamental organizing concept around governance, economy, and culture. Omi and Winant (2015) contend that race serves as a master category, exerting a profound influence in shaping social systems and

consequently structuring individual lives (p. 110). Racial formation or race-making is the process of "othering," based on the perceived phenotypical differences among human bodies. For this study, the researcher examined the experiences of executive leaders of HBCCs and PBCCs in creating strategic partnerships, using RFT as the frame for the research design. As applied to this study, part of the RFT framework considered how race has impacted the experiences of the participants and the need for partnerships. This theoretical approach was the most appropriate for this study because everything in society, including political, social, class, and economic status, comes down to race. Race, in this context, is a divider when it does not have to be; the effort and extent to define someone by their race is unjust and has negatively impacted higher education outcomes for Black students.

Conceptual Framework

Berger and Luckmann's (1966) Social Construction of Reality Theory provided the basis for building the conceptual framework for this study. Berger and Luckmann argue that the construction of knowledge is a social process, and humans, as social beings, shape their reality by engaging in interactions with one another. This includes the way humans see and interpret the world around them. The concept of social construction of reality provided a valuable framework for understanding how humans make meaning in their lives. It aided in explaining how and why people see and interact with the world differently (Nickerson, 2023). Berger and Luckmann (1966) define *reality* as "a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as being independent of our own volition" (p. 1). This definition means that people generally accept social reality as a truth that existed before their birth and will remain beyond their death. The authors argue that while humans can maintain various overlapping realities, the reality of everyday life is a primary guide.

Much of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) work focuses on the idea that humans habitualize their behavior. Habitualization occurs when people regularly repeat behaviors, an essential part of upholding reality. Berger and Luckmann state that habitualizations direct behavior and produce observable patterns. Once habits become legitimized and acknowledged as valid, they can become institutionalized. An institution is an arrangement of commonly shared beliefs, norms, or procedures (Nickerson, 2023). Berger and Luckmann assert that "the social channeling of activity is the essence of institutionalization, which is the foundation for the social construction of reality" (pp. 181-182). Institutionalizing behaviors form the basis of reality. Institutions provide systems of behavioral controls that emerge over time.

The beliefs instilled in us and our upbringing shape how we present ourselves and perceive others. Our beliefs and backgrounds (behaviors) shape how we view reality (institutionalization). Institutionalization also discourages change in social reality. Behaviors and attitudes institutionalized in the United States due to the history of slavery and Jim Crow create a reality for Black people. The War on Drugs, Stop & Frisk laws, events that led to the emergence of Black Lives Matter, the murder of George Floyd, and the attack on DEI in higher education all create a reality that Black people are continuously stereotyped, targeted, marginalized in society (Luppino, 2020). This theoretical approach was the most appropriate for this study because the assumptions of Social Construction of Reality Theory are essential to explaining the "reality" of Blackness in The South as it relates to partnerships in higher education.

Scope of Study

The scope of this study was limited to executive leaders serving in roles at the following senior levels: president, vice president, provost, dean, and executive director of HBCCs and PBCCs currently employed in The South. This study narrowed its focus on executive leaders

who had experience working with or developing relationships with external education partners. As of 2023, 49 HBCCs and PBCCs were located in The South (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2023).

Assumptions

The study assumed that all data collected from participants was honest, truthful, and unbiased. To promote honesty, participants acknowledged their informed consent and were guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. This study employed a narrative inquiry research design and a qualitative approach. Qualitative inquiry is subjective; therefore, the researcher interprets it by assuming the true meaning of the data collected.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters: (1) introduction, (2) literature review, (3) methodology, (4) findings, and (5) discussion and conclusion. The first chapter introduces the role of community colleges in workforce development, transfer, and educational attainment. Chapter One further explores the unique ability of community colleges to serve students of color who have been historically marginalized and underserved. It further details the history of HBCCs and PBCCs. Chapter One also introduces the research problem, purpose, and significance of the study before introducing the study's research question. The chapter defines key terms used throughout the study before outlining the theoretical and conceptual frameworks employed alongside the study's assumptions. Chapter One, as well as all chapters in this study, closes with a chapter summary.

Chapter Two provides additional literature on the frameworks used to examine the problem. It then provides a detailed literature review to examine and discuss the impact of community colleges and existing equity gaps in credential and job attainment. The chapter

includes literature surrounding Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the establishment of Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), racial equity in higher education, the state of higher education in The South, and legislation affecting Black students. Finally, this chapter examines literature surrounding strategic community college partnerships and the role of philanthropy.

The third chapter details the methodology chosen to guide this study, again reviewing the research question and detailing the research design and rationale for the chosen design. The chapter then provides context for the study population and sample/sampling procedures before describing the ethical considerations and informed consent procedures. The chapter concludes by describing the data collection techniques and processing procedures before describing how the data was analyzed according to the narrative inquiry methodology.

The fourth chapter outlines the findings of this study in narrative form through the use of Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative mode of analysis (narrative analysis) and paradigmatic mode of analysis (analysis of narratives). The chapter first consists of a narrative of lived experiences of partnerships for each participant, followed by a synthesis of their narrative. The chapter moves into the paradigmatic mode of analysis, where experiences were aligned into themes and subthemes up against the framework to identify the emergence of any additional themes further. Vignettes from each interview were included to provide contextual detail.

The fifth chapter concludes the study and first discusses the overall findings and alignment with the literature, as well as connections to the framework. The chapter provides implications and recommendations for practice, aligning with the literature, for successful partnerships with HBCCs and PBCCs. The final chapter concludes with the study's limitations, followed by recommendations for future research.

Chapter Summary

Federal and state funding of community colleges is decreasing, yet student outcome gaps are increasing. Community college students need support that institutions may be unable to provide without additional partners. More partnerships are needed to support, develop, and enhance equitable pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes, particularly for more vulnerable groups of students. Black students typically lag behind their White counterparts, but HBCCs and PBCCs outperform their counterparts in terms of graduation rates, transfer rates, and individual student outcomes for Black students. The institutions need more support to assist them in dismantling the systemic inequities we observe in the higher educational system. Using both RFT and Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality Theory, this study explored the lived experiences of institutional leaders within historically Black and predominantly Black community colleges who have collaborated with external education partners.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Impact of Community Colleges

Community colleges are critical partners in baccalaureate degree attainment. The transfer function of community colleges has been an essential element since their establishment in the early 1900s (Cohen and Brawer, 2003). In 2005, a U.S. Department of Education study showed that more than half of students who enter community college expect to earn a bachelor's degree. After two years of enrollment, about 19% more students raised their expectations to the bachelor's level (Adelman, 2005). In 2015, this number rose to 80% (Giancola and Davidson, 2015). Recent research indicates that the transfer rates for students attending community colleges fall within the range of 25% to 40%. Community colleges are increasingly recognized as an increasingly popular route toward obtaining a bachelor's degree (Melguizo, 2011, p 265). Dual credit options, early college options, other transfer options, and articulation agreements contribute to the community colleges' ability to catalyze and even accelerate further degree attainment. With so much scrutiny around the return on investment in higher education, community colleges contribute to decreasing the time it takes to complete a degree, thereby increasing the value of the investment (Tucker et al., 2023). Without community colleges, many students would not have access to or could afford higher education (Scheld, 2023).

Moreover, community colleges play a crucial role in workforce development and are acknowledged for their significance by federal and state legislators as well as national and regional businesses and industries (O'Banion, 2023). Workforce development has long been a priority for community colleges. In the early 19th century, public education and the labor force collaborated to generate a consistent supply of workers for specific occupations (ACTE, 2019). Community colleges are specifically well suited to provide career and technical training because

of their involvement with industry-backed advisory boards. The programs prepare students for high-wage, high-skill, high-demand careers that lead to gainful employment that will afford them social mobility and economic stability in a relatively short time frame (ACTE, 2022; Gauthier, 2020). Career and technical training is the bridge that connects education with practical skills learning that provides a direct connection to employment (Haviland and Robbins, 2021). Community colleges fulfill a need for flexible training for working adults to accommodate needed scheduling that can often be found at for-profit institutions but at a higher price tag (McConville et al., 2021).

Community colleges help students build networks and connect to resources they may not have otherwise accessed, such as social capital. Community colleges are places where students can accumulate substantive or inherent resources through a network or a series of reliable networks combining one or more institutionalized relationships. Through membership within a group, each member gains associates and appreciation and ultimately gains the support and respective benefits of the entire network's collective capital (Coleman, 1988). Social capital creates pathways to resources that facilitate the achievement of employment objectives, help students access mentorship, and contribute to positive student outcomes (Barton & Coley, 2010). Instructors and academic counselors are the main access points for networking and social capital development at community colleges. Community colleges assist students in developing social capital by providing orientations, workshops, summer camps, interactions with staff to familiarize them with their roles in supporting student success, and connections with senior students who share their experiences in navigating the campus and accessing institutional resources (Chen and Soko, 2018). Social capital influencers like faculty interaction, transfer

services, and general support services significantly contribute to students' degree aspirations and intent of upward transfer (Lew, 2019).

Furthermore, community colleges are engines of economic mobility for the wide range of students it serves. Women and disadvantaged students, who would not have otherwise attended college, experience much more significant earnings boosts after completing community college (Mountjoy, 2022). In 2020, the average associate degree graduate was expected to earn $9,600 per year higher than a person with a high school diploma or equivalent working in the U.S., which, over a working lifetime, will be about $403,200 in higher earnings per graduate (American Association of Community Colleges, 2022). A research report by HEA revealed that there are 17 associate degree majors with which graduates, four years after receiving their diploma, earn more than the typical bachelor's degree holder (Itzkowitz, 2023). Since community colleges disproportionately serve low-income and minority students, the potential for improving the economic mobility of many people is vast (Levesque, 2018).

Community colleges are taking on the vital task of seeing students as people and focusing on the needs that threaten their persistence and success (Achieving the Dream, 2023). Nonacademic barriers to success can be equally or even more challenging than academic barriers (Community College Research Center, 2013). Goldrick-Rab et al. (2017) found that nearly 70% of the approximately 33,000 community college students surveyed identified as food insecure. Research from Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2017) identified that community college students were more likely to experience food insecurity or homelessness compared to the general U.S. population. Over the years, community college support has expanded not only to include enhanced advising, student success courses, and learning communities but also veterans services, transportation services, food services, childcare, and other financial assistance (Community

College Research Center, 2013; Troester-Trate, 2018; Baugus, 2019). Basic needs insecurity often forces students to prioritize meeting basic needs over educational engagement, which takes significant time and energy away from coursework (Hallett and Freas, 2018).

Equity Gaps: Credential and Job Attainment

Access to higher education significantly influences the economic prospects and various life outcomes for Black students, who enroll in community colleges at higher rates than any other higher education institution (Carnavale & Strohl, 2013; Community College Research Center, 2021). Nevertheless, their graduation rates are lower compared to White students, graduating at a rate of 28% within six years (Community College Research Center, 2021). Black students have the highest dropout and lowest completion rates at two-year and four-year institutions (Espinoza et al., 2019). Black students are less likely than white students to earn a high-value career credential, transfer to a four-year college, or earn a bachelor's degree (Lin, 2020). Jenkins and Weiss (2011) found that students from low-income backgrounds were less likely to enter a program of study, which leads to a lack of direction and completion of any credentials. Student demographics play a significant role in impacting the attainment of early academic milestones in community colleges, including credit accumulation, enrollment in a specific program of study, completion of remedial requirements, and success in introductory-level math and English courses. These factors influence the probability of graduation (Holzer & Xu, 2019). However, when Black students complete an associate degree, they complete bachelor's degrees at higher rates than their counterparts (Lin, 2020).

Research shows that earning just a few community college credits without completing a credential can benefit the labor market (Belfield & Bailey, 2017; Jacobson et al., 2005). Accumulating some valuable credits in the marketplace can be more valuable than simply

amassing credits that will lead to an associate degree (Ziedenberg et al., 2015). In some career and technical education (CTE) fields closely linked to employment sectors, students can earn much more money than the cost of the classes without completing a credential, making not completing a credential more appealing than completing it (Bahr, 2019). Earning an associate degree or long-term certificate increases the likelihood of employment by an average of 10% within any given field (Dadgar & Trimble, 2015). Completing associate's degrees results in enhanced outcomes compared to non-completion, encompassing higher-paying employment, increased employment stability, and a greater probability of earning a living wage (Minaya and Scott-Clayton, 2022). However, students from low-income backgrounds and historically underrepresented students of color are more likely to enter majors that lead to lower wage employment due to economic and educational disadvantages (Lin, 2020).

Historically Black and Predominantly Black Community Colleges

The Allegheny Institute and Mission Church (Avery College) was founded in 1849, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was the first known institution dedicated to providing higher education to Black students. The college was later renamed in honor of its founder, Charles Avery, who was originally an immigrant shopkeeper but became a cotton merchant (Elliott et al., 2019). Charles Avery was an abolitionist who sought to offer elementary and advanced education to African-American students after being affected by seeing the plight of enslaved people after several visits to The South. The college eventually closed in 1873, but it is known as one of the earliest and most ambitious efforts to provide higher education to Black students (Avery College Historical Marker, 2011). After the Civil War, many other white religious groups collaborated with the Freedman’s Bureau to create educational institutions that grew into Black colleges (Elliot et al., 2019). In 1896, Plessy vs. Ferguson established separate but equal laws

that applied to the social, economic, political, and cultural codes (National Archives, 2022; Elliott et al., 2019). Laws concerning the colleges were left to the individual states, further marginalizing the early Black colleges (Elliott et al., 2019).

Twenty-five private and 24 public historically Black community colleges (HBCCs) once existed in the United States. A total of 12 remain in operation. Many closed due to financial reasons, while others merged with other local institutions (Rutgers Center for MSIs, 2018; Elliott et al., 2019). All 12 operating institutions were established before 1964, and this, along with their student populations and institutional objectives, made them eligible for the federal designation as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Gasman, 2008). Each of the 12 HBCCs is located in The Southeast and Southwest of the United States. **Table 1** provides a list of all current Historically Black Community Colleges.

Table 1: *Current Historically Black Community Colleges*

Institution	**State**	**Founded**	**Control**
Bishop State Community College	AL	1927	Public
Coahoma Community College	MS	1924	Public
Denmark Technical College	SC	1948	Public
Gadsden State Community College	AL	1925	Public
H. Councill Trenholm State Community College	AL	1961	Public
Hinds Community College at Utica	MS	1903	Public
J.F. Drake State Community and Technical College	AL	1961	Public

Table 1 (continued).

Lawson State Community College-Birmingham Campus	AL	1949	Public
Shelton State Community College	AL	1952	Public
Shorter College	AR	1886	Private
Southern University at Shreveport	LA	1967	Public
St. Philip's College	TX	1898	Public

Note. Institutions identified from data from the Rutgers Center for Minority-Serving Institutions (Elliott et al., 2019).

According to Elliot et al. (2019), federal and state appropriations to HBCCs decreased by 27% from 1995 to 2015. In addition, HBCCs reduced tuition by 6% during the same period. Due to this reduction in funding, HBCCs have experienced a growing dependence on local appropriations and grants, demonstrating a notable increase of 405% during the corresponding period. (Elliott et al.) Amidst this funding fluctuation, credential attainment increased by 75%, demonstrating the flexibility and buoyancy of HBCCs. Historically Black colleges and universities are "disproportionately successful at preparing Black students for jobs in science, technology, and engineering" (Crowe, 2022, p. 31).

In 2008, the US Congress recognized Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs). It incorporated them in the Higher Education Act of 2008, allowing them to apply for more federal funding to serve their majority populations of low-income Black students (Jones, 2019). To be recognized as a PBI, the institution must have at least 1,000 undergraduate students; an undergraduate enrollment that is at least 50% low-income or first-generation; an undergraduate

enrollment that is at least 50% degree-seeking; a low expenditure per full-time undergraduate student in comparison with other institutions offering similar instruction; and at least 40% of enrolled students identifying as Black Americans (Higher Education Act, 2008).

Though PBIs enroll the majority of Black students, they are not and cannot be a Historically Black College or University. In contrast to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs) do not state a specific mission of serving Black students, and a considerable number do not make reference to their current designation or Black students in their mission statements (Jones, 2019). However, PBIs still provide access for Black students to higher education they may not otherwise access. In 2019, there were 104 recognized PBIs, but in 2023, that number diminished to 71 recognized PBIs (Jones, 2019; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2023). Forty-nine currently recognized PBIs are Predominantly Black Community Colleges (PBCCs) located in The South (Complete College America, 2022).

Racial Inequity in Higher Education

Underfunding at the K-12 level leads to inequities in performance in higher education for Black students. “Across the country, districts with the most Black, Latino, and Native students receive substantially less state and local revenue — as much as $2,700 per student — less than districts with the fewest students of color” (The Education Trust, 2022, para. 1). Just a 10% increase in funding at the K-12 level is associated with .46 additional years of higher education, 9.6% higher earnings, and a 6.1% decrease in adult poverty (Jackson et al., 2016). Black students are systematically concentrated in separate school districts from White students within the same state, leading to shifts in funding patterns that severely impact student performance (Sosina and Weathers, 2019). Society frequently questions the dedication of Black families to education;

however, there is often a misconception that people mistake the willingness to pursue education with the available means to do so (Perry, 2014). In turn, many Black students enter colleges labeled as unprepared and have to enroll in developmental education, which can delay or disrupt college completion (Preston, 2017).

In 1926, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote about the experiences of Black students in higher education in his essay, *Negroes in College*. He spoke truthfully about the challenges of African American students attending both predominantly "colored" and predominantly White institutions, saying that "the attitude of the Northern institution toward the Negro student is one which varies from tolerance to active hostility" (Du Bois, 1926, p. 240). Historically Black Colleges and Universities were born out of a historical unwillingness to educate Black students within White majority schools (Museus et al., 2015). Though the second Morrill Act provided funding for Black colleges, it perpetuated racial inequity in higher education due to existing segregation and a focus on agriculture and mechanics for the Black curriculum (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Museus et al., 2015).

The withdrawal of state funding from higher education, escalating college expenses, heightened dependence on loans, and the presence of for-profit colleges with predatory practices collectively create additional barriers to college affordability. Funding challenges disproportionately affect Black students, who are more inclined to come from low-income backgrounds (Museus et al., 2015). Conservative politicians feel it costs too much to treat education as a social program, so federal and state support has decreased over the past 25 years (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). Meanwhile, average college tuition costs continue to rise. Recently, financial aid packages have changed from focusing on need-based grants to merit-based grants and loans, which negatively impacts low-income students and students of color

(Long & Riley, 2007). “Certain institutions that prepare the largest share of people of color and students from lower-income backgrounds (community colleges and minority-serving institutions) are cyclically disadvantaged by lower appropriations from state governments” (Harper et al., 2020, p 2).

“Equity is rooted in achieving racial proportionality in all educational outcomes and in critically assessing whiteness at the institutional and practice levels. It is about acknowledging and addressing racism in our educational systems” (Bensimon, 2018, p. 98). The degree to which racialized experiences are transparent to White people is vital in understanding the nuances of how race and privilege play out in higher education (Evatt, 2019). There is no way to untangle the inequities in higher education from society. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, educational policies at all levels were supposed to provide equitable access and opportunity, regardless of one’s race, sex, and residency. However, to this day, a disproportionate number of Black Americans live in poor neighborhoods with no access to quality healthcare, nutritious food, fair policing, and high-quality schools (Harper & Simmons, 2020). Further inequity exists on the college campus, including who gets admitted, how students feel they belong once admitted, the inclusiveness of the environment, the cultural relevance of the curriculum, the diversity of faculty and staff, and personal wellness (Harper & Simmons, 2020).

Literature dating back to the 1960s describes Black faculty’s frustration with working in white colleges and universities (Tillman, 2018). The literature consistently identifies isolation, racism, devaluation of research, and lack of positive mentoring relationships as barriers to the career and personal success of faculty of color. Black faculty research based on racial or cultural issues is often looked down upon by their white counterparts (Stanley, 2006). Faculty of color face more barriers to career advancement than their white counterparts even after proving

themselves over and over again and choosing university culture over ethnic culture (Tillman, 2018; Bonner, 2004; Stanly, 2006). Achieving racial equity is closely tied to enhancing overall racial diversity on campus, expanding the pool of tenured faculty members from diverse backgrounds, and improving the retention rates of faculty members of color (Tillman, 2018; Museus et al., 2015). Although some progress has been made in some states, race inequities for Blacks among full-time faculty and administrators remain (Perna et al., 2007).).

The State of Higher Education in The South

The era of Jim Crow was a time in U.S. history from the late 19th century through the first half of the 20th century in which state and local laws mandating segregation still affect higher education in The South today. These disparities continue to occur because Black Americans are thwarted politically from making change. After all, politicians use their power to make it harder for Black people to vote (Haines, 2022). Giroux (2021) argues that Jim Crow politics are back and are as strong as ever. The higher education landscape is moving toward demonization of those that would address critical matters of racial inequality and social injustice. Understanding The South and Jim Crow laws as the backdrop for Black identity "unearths nuances about identity, life, and learning that social scientists have been slow to discover—at least as related to the nation's Black residents" (Morris and Monroe, 2009, p. 28).

A report by Bellwether Education Partners states that The Southern region of the United States (The South) educates 56 percent of all Black students in the United States. The South is home to 38 percent of all Americans, including more than half of the nation's Black population. The South contributes more to the U.S. economy than any other region but has higher poverty and lower income rates than other regions. Only 20 percent of national philanthropic giving occurs in The South (Robson et al., 2019). In many Southern states, children are unlikely to grow

up to make more money than their parents (Opportunity Insights, n.d.). In The South, Black communities historically experience achievement gaps due to food deserts, inadequate childcare, over-incarceration, unsafe housing, inadequate medical services, and poorly resourced schools (Crowe, 2022). Rural areas experience even worse barriers to education. The next closest school district is up to 60 miles away, limiting schooling options. There is a lack of indoor plumbing, no infrastructure for internet access, and little to no high-skill, high-demand jobs close to these areas (Robson et al., 2019).

The seemingly endless cycle keeps parents with few resources to send their children to college. Koichich (2014) found that students in rural areas of The South were less likely to enroll in college than students in metropolitan areas. According to the Economic Research Service (2015), the number of adults living in urban areas who had obtained a bachelor's degree increased from 26 to 33 % from 2000 to 2015. In contrast, for rural areas, the percentage of adults obtaining bachelor's degrees grew less from 15 % to 19 %. By 2019, 46% of Black adults 25 and older had a high school diploma or less, and 22% had a bachelor's degree. (Crowe, 2022). Southern states have been decreasing high education spending at a disproportionate rate, creating a cycle of poor, undereducated people who are further and further away from being able to afford higher education (Pratt, 2016). Four of the five states where a community college costs the most for the poorest students are in The South, costing families up to 47% of their income for an associate's degree: Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Arkansas (Institute for Research on Higher Education, 2016). Without access to affordable education, the region's economy will suffer, further entrenching poverty (Pratt, 2016).

Higher Education Policies Impacting Black Students

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890

The Morrill Act of 1890 sought to address the racial inequities of the first Morrill Act, under which institutions denied Black students admission. The new policy provided funds to support colleges that avoided using race in admissions decisions or establishing separate educational institutions for Black students. (National Archives, 2022). The Act created 21 land grant HBCUs, though they were not given an equitable share of the funding (Allen & Esters, 2018).

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 sought to protect people from discrimination based on race, color, and national origin at institutions that received federal funding. This Act pertained to admissions, financial aid, student services, grading, and housing, to name a few, in public and private colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). This Act paved the way for Black students to attend integrated schools (Library of Congress, (n.d.).

Higher Education Act of 1965

The Higher Education Act of 1965 provided federal financial assistance through grants, loans, scholarships, and work-study to students in higher education. President Johnson saw the need for higher education opportunities for lower and middle-income families and improved resources at higher education institutions (McCants, 2003). "The gap in Black and white students' degree attainment is higher than it was when the Higher Education Act was passed in 1965, which exacerbates the risks of student loans for Black students" (Mishory et al., 2019).

Affirmative Action in College Admissions

Affirmative Action in college admissions is a federal law that allows colleges to grant admissions to promote acceptance of students with diverse backgrounds (National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, 2023). Affirmative action "ensured students of color

receive fair consideration for admissions given the systemic barriers, underinvestment in schools that students of color attend, inequities in access to advanced coursework, and non-academic factors that advantage White and wealthier applicants" (The Education Trust, 2023, para. 1).

Higher Education Act of 2008

The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 2008, enables Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs) to apply for federal funding to expand their capacity to support low- and middle-income students under the Strengthening Predominantly Black Institutions Program managed by the Department of Education. Funding in the form of annual formula grants helps institutions "to expand higher education opportunities for eligible students by encouraging college preparation and student persistence in secondary school and postsecondary education, and to strengthen the financial ability of the institution to serve the academic needs of these students" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, para. 1).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Legislation

As of July 2023, forty anti-DEI bills have been introduced in 22 states, and seven have become law. Four of the states that passed the law are in The South. This legislation restricts the operation of DEI offices and staff, mandatory DEI training, diversity statement use, and identity-based hiring and admissions (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2023). Anti-DEI legislation severely limits pathways for historically underrepresented students to access higher education and adds to a false narrative that further marginalizes these student groups (Nellums, 2023).

The End of Affirmative Action

In June 2023, The U.S. Supreme Court reversed Affirmative Action, declaring that race can no longer be a factor in college admissions (Debusmann, 2023). Affirmative Action has been in place since 1978, and its removal undoes progress in fighting racial discrimination (Hurley,

2023). "The effects will be felt in every aspect of the nation's economic, educational, and social life--from the Rooney rule to employment and DEI programs in schools and workplaces" (Totenburg, 2023).

Leaders of Color in Higher Education

In 1986, presidents of color constituted 8 percent of all college and university presidents. By 2016, this number had risen to 17 percent; in 2022, presidents of color make up 15.9 percent of all presidents. Thirty-one percent of these lead at associate degree-granting institutions (Melidona et al., 2023). The demographics of college presidents do not mirror those of society, much less the campuses and student populations that they serve (Melidona et al., 2023).

Scholars specializing in higher education leadership and diversity attributed the rise in hiring minority leaders to various factors: heightened external demands on colleges to enhance diversity, influenced by movements like Black Lives Matter and calls for racial justice; an increased pool of minority candidates, partly because of programs aimed at grooming new leaders; a change in the qualities and skills institutions prioritize in leaders; and changes in the methods and venues colleges and universities employ for recruitment, among others (Lederman, 2022).

Presidents of color perceive less disclosure about the real institutional challenges before accepting the position than their white counterparts (Melidona et al., 2023). Individuals are attracted to the position due to its perceived status, particularly among African Americans and individuals from diverse backgrounds. However, what truly appeals to them is the opportunity to contribute to the mission and effect meaningful change. There are undoubtedly challenges, ranging from financial matters and operational funding to academic concerns such as enrollment

and student achievement. However, the inherent value and impact of the role remain significant (WittKieffer, 2019).

Many presidents of color are often the first to achieve the role. There is a larger pool of well-prepared minority candidates than in previous years, and programs tailored explicitly to identifying and training underrepresented minority candidates and women for presidencies have made significant contributions (Melidona et al., 2023; Lederman, 2022). Presidents of color may benefit from better support networks with others who have experienced the presidency firsthand and understand its unique challenges (Melidona et al., 2023). Racism contributes to discrimination, highlighted through various barriers including 1) exclusion from informal networks, 2) insufficient support, 3) absence of role models, 4) credential-based discrimination, 5) biased performance criteria, 6) perceived inadequacy or incompetence, 7) stereotyping, 8) use of coded language, and 9) lack of acknowledgment for their accomplishments or contributions (Crim, 2021).

Community College Partnerships

The demographics of community colleges constantly challenge the institutions to find new ways to meet the needs of multiple learners. Partnerships are one of the main strategies for achieving the comprehensive goals of the community college in an environment of budget constraints (Arney, 2010). Irwin and Patrick (2016) describe partnerships as essential to upholding the community college mission. Partnerships must be responsive to political forces, varying cultural values, and social ecosystems (Amey, Eddy, & Campbell, 2010). According to Boswell and Wilson (2004), many states have experienced declines or eliminations in state funding for higher education, leading to dramatic changes in the system. Universities must still

ensure universal access and open enrollment and comply with current educational mandates despite financial and economic constraints.

Higher education institutions must embrace innovative strategies to achieve their institutional goals. One effective tactic involves forging partnerships with external entities. Eddy (2010) defines partnerships as strategic alliances or collaborations that offer fertile ground for joint endeavors. These collaborations often arise from a shared recognition among partners of the mutual benefits of working together to achieve common goals, resulting in a win-win scenario. Partnerships provide numerous advantages to higher education institutions, including financial backing, expanded educational opportunities for stakeholders, enhanced public relations, strengthened operational infrastructure, and the facilitation of knowledge creation (Brown, Williams & Esters, 2021).

Strategic partnerships in higher education with critical stakeholders such as K-12 schools, universities, businesses and industry, nonprofits, and government agencies are occurring more routinely. Often, the origin of a partnership can be traced, but it is harder to identify what makes a partnership successful, effective, and sustainable (Arney, 2010). Research on the prevalence, common structures, and, most importantly, the outcomes of collaborative community college partnerships remains scant (Suazo deCastro and Karp, 2009).

Students need support on their educational paths that community colleges, on their own, just cannot provide. Community college students' intersectionality causes them to balance multiple responsibilities and commitments that can become barriers to success in higher education (Strada Center for Education Consumer Insights, 2020). Cost is a significant factor, especially non-academic costs such as food, transportation, childcare, and housing (Kelchen, 2015). When partnerships yield reciprocal advantages for the college and its partnering

institutions, aligning with a shared vision and goals, the outcomes can be transformative for the institutions involved and profoundly impact the students and community members they serve (Achieving the Dream, 2022). Community college partnerships restructure and finance programs and support services to help students transition to four-year and the workforce (Suazo deCastro and Karp, 2009).

The Aspen Institute (n.d.) uses the term "collective impact" to describe strategic partnerships in which multiple organizations work to achieve a common social goal with shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support. ATD's Strategic Partnerships for Holistic Student Supports Toolkit (2022) offers suggestions for partnering with community-based organizations, nonprofits, businesses, and government institutions to create equitable student outcomes. Engaging with internal and external groups can enhance existing programs and address service gaps, particularly in supporting low-income students (Lumina Foundation, (n.d.). Partnership becomes a way to reduce the need to design something new when both partners bring their strengths to the table. Partnership with organizations that can maximize the potential for students to achieve their goals is critical to their success.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) (2018) outlines three primary partnership types: public-private partnership (P3), collaborations with other educational institutions, and community partnerships. Private entities and institutions collaborate to address specific needs, projects, or initiatives. P3 partnerships include public resources, private investments, and shared responsibilities to achieve common goals. Such partnerships include institutions collaborating with developers to lease campus land or facilities. Educational institution collaborations 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. As per AASCU (2018), community partnerships are vital in assisting institutions in impacting communities. They can yield internal benefits, such as augmenting resources for student support or healthcare services, as well as external-facing advantages, like involvement in social justice endeavors or leveraging institutional expertise to contribute to the objectives of nonprofit organizations. These partnerships serve as a straightforward entry point for collaboration. However, leadership support is necessary.

Philanthropic Funding

In 1902, the General Education Board (GEB) began with 1 million dollars in funding from John D. Rockefeller in an early effort to improve racial educational outcomes. By 1964, this investment grew to $325 million. However, the GEB still had to work within the law of the Jim Crow South, building separate schools for Black students with a focus on industrial education, much to the chagrin of Black leaders of the time like W. E B. DuBois (Goldberg and Shubinski, 2020; Rockefeller Archive Center, n.d.). In the 1970s, community colleges established foundations to raise private funds (Glass & Jackson, 1998). The American Association of Community Colleges announced in 1996 that the average value of community college endowments was $2.1 million, while that of four-year institutions was $350 million (MacArthur, 2000). Today, traditional funding sources are dwindling, and community colleges continue to struggle to finance the ever-increasing needs of their internal and external stakeholders (Sheldon, 2003). "Community colleges educate many people but attract less than four percent of philanthropic dollars in higher education, totaling $98 billion" (Dayal, 2021, para. 4).

Studies show that only a few community college donors are alumni, employees, or affiliated with community colleges. Carter and Duggan (2010) and Prince (2016) identify many individuals who give back to their communities or express gratitude by donating and categorize them as "Communitarians" and "Repayers." From 2020 - 2021, 61 percent of charitable donations to higher education came from organizations, 22 percent came from alumni, and 16 percent came from non-alumni (Knox, 2023). The growth rate of charitable giving in the last few years is 13 percent - $52.9 billion in fiscal year 2021, up from $49.5 billion in fiscal year 2020 (Moody, 2022). Beginning in 2020, philanthropists began donating to educational institutions in Black communities across the country in mass after the murder of George Floyd. His death brought to light the racial inequities that have existed in the United States for a long time (Saul, 2021). Most of these funds are non-discretionary, enabling the institutions to use the funding where appropriate in enrollment, retention, tuition, and student success (Kumah-Abiwu, 2023).

Still, historically Black and predominantly Black institutions continue to face challenges, with one of the significant challenges being the lack of funding (Gasman, 2013). The Urban Institute reported in 2021 that philanthropic giving directs only 3% towards The South. (Mitchell, 2021). Large funders often dismiss the South or focus on their "favorite" areas, leaving more rural areas to struggle. According to the Bellwether Report, venture capitalists invest just one dollar out of every ten in The Southern region (Robson et al., 2019). The Supreme Court's decision to end affirmative action has again sparked a need for philanthropy, specifically in The South, where affirmative action once meant a better opportunity for Black students to access higher education. In The South, where needs are substantial and support is often lacking, it is paramount to pursue racial equity so that philanthropy remains committed (Palmore, 2023).

Racial Formation Theory

Omi and Winant (2015) developed the Racial Formation Theory (RFT), which conceptualizes how race is formed, how it interacts with society in the United States, and what it signifies. According to their theory, racial projects play a central role in signifying differences among people through language, thought, imagery, popular discourse, and interaction, and assign meaning to race. In the United States, these projects frame how race is understood, described, and represented, and have significant political and economic consequences for access to rights and resources. Racial projects have led to detrimental effects on particular racial groups in terms of employment opportunities, political office, educational opportunities, police harassment, conviction, and incarceration. However, it is possible to effect change in the social structure of race by changing representation, thoughts, discourse, and action in response to race through racial projects (Cole, 2019b).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework for examining the role of race and racism in society that builds on RFT. According to CRT, race is also socially constructed and based on historical contingencies. According to CRT's argument, legal, social, political, economic, and cultural institutions historically embedded racial hierarchies and discrimination. Racial discrimination affects opportunities and outcomes for Black people (Stefancic and Delgado, 2010). CRT encourages people to think about and confront the role that race and racism have played in society based on the legacy of slavery and segregation. Racism is still ubiquitous in the everyday lives of Black Americans (Geroge, 2021). Critics of CRT believe that the focus on race excludes other important influences, such as capitalism, or that CRT is simply a form of storytelling without a critical lens (Ledesma and Calderon, 2015). Many people hope that CRT

can help to emancipate and empower those who are disenfranchised by current policies, structures, and scholarship, despite critiques of the approach. (George, 2021).

Racial Equity Theory of Change

The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change (2009) developed the Racial Equity Theory of Change (RETOC) by incorporating ideas from CRT and RFT. According to RETOC, "whiteness" has been granted privileges and "color" has been subjected to disadvantages due to certain aspects of U.S. history and culture (p. 7). RETOC suggests that racism is ingrained in the social, political, and economic aspects of society. Additionally, RETOC recognizes that racial disparities have been attributed to group characteristics rather than historical and institutional assignments to the meaning of race, due to cultural representations (projects). RETOC presents a methodology that aims to end persistent racial outcome disparities in any given context by developing a vision of change and identifying early actions that can be taken towards that goal. To eliminate racial outcome gaps, it is necessary to identify the structural factors and their sources and make changes to the systems that perpetuate inequities.

Chapter Summary

Black Americans have a long, arduous, and still unfulfilled struggle to access high quality higher education. The literature presented in this section examines the impact of community colleges, equity gaps in credential and job attainment, the history and establishment of HBCCs and PBCCs, racial inequity in higher education, the influence of The South on Black outcomes, legislation impacting Black students, and the vital role of partnerships and philanthropy. The researcher examined how RFT, CRT, and RETOC provide critiques of race and racism in the United States. The researcher attempted to make the case that structural racism is responsible for the opportunity gaps that exist for Black people. However, community colleges are institutions

that have the capability and infrastructure to develop more equitable pathways for Black learners. To create these transformative pathways, community colleges need partners with the shared vision and goal of eliminating the structural barriers for Black students.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research design chosen for this study and the population considered. It also outlines the procedures used for gathering and analyzing data. A single overarching research inquiry drove this qualitative research approach:

> *What are the lived experiences of institutional leaders within historically Black and predominantly Black community colleges who have collaborated with external education partners to support, develop, and enhance equitable pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes?*

Research Design and Rationale

Little existing scholarly literature connects the experiences of HBCC and PBCC administrators working with external educational partners who seek to advance the mission of equitable outcomes in credential attainment, transfer, and employment. Research around Black institutions has significant gaps that, if filled, will strengthen these institutions and enhance student learning, which has contributed to the strength of the research design for this study (Gasman & Commodore (2014). More research focuses on 4-year historically Black institutions; however, it provided a careful approach to "call out and distinguish historically Black community colleges from their counterparts because of their distinctive characteristics, histories, and missions" (Elliot et al., 2019, p. 781). Because of the need to further explore how HBCCs and PBCCs connect to external partners, the design relied upon the fact that "If a concept or phenomenon 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, 2018, p. 19). This study used the qualitative narrative inquiry approach, as the

researcher sought to investigate a unique population of institutional leaders to make sense of their experiences. Narrative analysis offers a valuable approach to revealing the core beliefs or underlying principles woven into stories and the broader societal context shaping these narratives (Stokes, 2021). Since there are "relatively few empirical studies" on predominantly Black community colleges, it was even more appropriate to use narrative inquiry in this case (Elliot et al., 2019, p. 770).

Population

The population of this study was limited to executive leaders within predominantly Black and historically Black community colleges who have collaborated with external partners to support, develop, and enhance student outcomes. This methodological approach was designed to explore individual stories. These leaders were employed at HBCCs and PBCCs in roles representative of president, vice-president, provost, dean, and executive director. In addition, the population chosen for this study was representative of only HBCCs and PBCCs in The South.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

This study relied upon snowball sampling, a form of purposeful sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample for this study consisted of twelve HBCCs and 16 PBCCs based upon the U.S. Department of Education's Formula grant awards, designed to allow them to apply for more federal funding to serve their majority populations of low-income Black students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Funds were awarded to 58 higher education institutions across the U.S. The researcher eliminated institutions that were not community colleges or technical schools, as well as institutions that were outside of The Southern region. The remaining PBCCs totaled 16 and were included in the sample for this study. The researcher connected with executive leaders representing roles such as president, vice-president, provost, dean, and

executive director of HBCCs and PBCCs who were currently employed at one of 28 HBCCs and PBCCs in the United States Southern region. The researcher was able to access the sample through publicly available email addresses. An invitation to participate was sent via email (Appendix A) requesting that it be shared with appropriate persons on their campuses.

The sample was screened through a survey (Appendix B). The survey tool captured confirmation of their involvement in partnership development, collected demographic information, and requested their participation in a virtual interview. The researcher emailed the interested participants (Appendix C) to answer the screening survey questions and schedule interviews. After the initial interviews were complete, the researcher asked participants to share the study and invitation email with other college leaders who met the eligibility criteria for the study.

Participants

Participants were confirmed and invited to a virtual interview from the sample and results taken from the pre-screening survey. The confirmed number of participants for this study was 8, which fell within the originally identified range of 6 to 12. This is consistent with how qualitative researchers have recognized meta-themes within the first six interviews and data saturation within the first twelve interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

The researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board of North Carolina State University (Appendix F) as the Review Board “protects 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).

Ethical issues can arise anytime, even before or after data collection. Issues could include a breach of confidentiality or anonymity, potential unintended damages, or confusion about the role of the researcher (Taquette and Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). To avoid this, the researcher clearly explained the purpose of the study and put confidentiality measures in place. In addition, all participants verbally acknowledged and affirmed an informed consent form (Appendix D), which contained details about the voluntary nature of the study. Their right to withdraw at any time was provided in writing prior to each interview.

Confidentiality

The consent forms shared with participants were used to detail how confidentiality and their data were protected. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the interview process at any time; however, none chose to withdraw. Before starting each interview, participants were asked if they had questions about the consent form and were asked to verbally consent before proceeding. Creswell (2014) recommended using pseudonyms in research to protect participant identity and ensure participant privacy. To protect their confidentiality, self-selected pseudonyms were used to de-identify participants and their institutions. Master crosswalks, which connected their names and emails to the data, were eliminated once data collection concluded.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

For data collection purposes, the researcher conducted eight in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews provided flexibility, allowing the researcher to establish a normal conversation flow with the participant. The interviewer could ask follow-up questions rather than sticking strictly to the protocol (Kallio et al., 2016). This study asked participants to recall previous events and perceptions of the events, which required probing for more information or clarification, so an in-depth interview was most appropriate (Barriball, 1994).

Before the start of each interview, the researcher asked the participant to identify a pseudonym for their first name and the institution's name. Pseudonyms were used throughout the interview to ensure confidentiality and de-identification. The interview protocol (Appendix E) contained questions related to an administrator's decision-making process when working with external education partners, attitudes and perceptions of partnership with external education partners, expectations of support and partnerships, and participant challenges working with external education partners and driving equitable pathways and credential attainment for students. 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 were held via Zoom, a video/audio conferencing tool secured by NC State University. This tool was used to record both video and audio of the participants, allowing the researcher to document both verbal and nonverbal responses. These tools also allowed space for the researcher to capture transcription. After each interview, the researcher reviewed the recordings and transcripts for edits to the transcriptions, if needed. During the interview, the researcher also used memoing to take notes and record observations, creating an audit trail. Memoing involved capturing the researcher's reflections, insights, and interpretations as data was collected. This process allowed the researcher to identify emerging patterns and themes more quickly (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008). The transcripts were exported to the researcher's password-protected NC State Google Drive, where they were accessed for data processing.

Data Processing

The researcher used a computer-aided data analysis software called ATLAS.ti to organize and code the data from each interview (Friese, 2012). All transcripts were uploaded to ATLAS.ti

and saved together as a password-protected project to ensure data safety. Labels were assigned to each transcript in ATLAS.ti. Once labels were made and transcripts were available for processing, the researcher made coding decisions and formed conclusions that were tied to the theoretical framework and further contributed to grouping. These codes and notes were stored in ATLAS.ti and acted as a resource for the researcher as the analysis continued, supporting reflexivity.

Data Security

Data collected for the study included input via the Qualtrics pre-screening form by participants to collect demographic information and interview transcripts generated from Zoom recordings. All recordings were stored in the researcher's NC State Zoom account, secured by the university, and the researcher's password. All interview transcripts were maintained in the researcher's password-protected transcription application for Windows devices on the researcher's password-protected personal computer. The transcription application encrypted data and stored it on the cloud, adding an additional security layer. Further, to ensure an advanced layer of data security, Otter.ai was used to collect a duplicate transcript.

Exported transcripts were placed in the researcher's NC State Google Drive and then exported to the newest version of ATLAS.ti software for data analysis. ATLAS.ti made a copy of the transcript and stored it internally. The ATLAS.ti software tracked changes made within the project and the username of the persons making the changes. ATLAS.ti projects were password protected. The researcher was the sole user of the ATLAS.ti software with access to all data.

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 and 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 clarified the data beyond just a narrative analysis (a form of storytelling and retelling of information). It also considered 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 analysis allowed the researcher to differentiate each participant's experience and deem them unique (Polkinghorne, 1995). Each interview was initially coded using open coding, 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, the researcher used axial coding to take the labels (nodes) and group them 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). Next, the researcher analyzed patterns and trends in the dataset to interpret the findings based on insights from the data. Finally, selective coding was used to identify key themes based on all the labels.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

“Although qualitative research has become increasingly recognized and valued for its unique place… 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,

pp. 1, 3). To confirm the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher sought peer scrutiny of the research project from a committee of experts and engaged in frequent debriefing sessions with the study's faculty advisor and peer debriefer (Barber & Walczak, 2009). Further, the researcher practiced member checking, one of the most critical practices for assessing trustworthiness (Kornbluh, 2015). The researcher conducted member checking by providing each participant with a copy of the interview transcript and asking them to review it for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Soliciting input ensured that the researcher accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences and contributed to the triangulation of the data.

Limitations & Delimitations

There were limitations in this study, including the sample size, which did not allow findings to be generalized beyond the scope of this study. Additionally, the study relied upon the honesty of each participant to authentically document and retell their stories.

Delimitations related directly to the boundaries set by the researcher included the population. While this study captured the lived experiences of HBCC and PBCC leaders from the institutions where the participants worked, it did not capture the lived experiences of all HBCC and PBCC leaders. This study was limited to HBCCs and PBCCs, which excluded perspectives from other institutions that were not classified as such. Administrative leaders for this study were limited to president, vice-president, provost, dean, and executive director.

The region for this study was limited to institutions located in The Southeastern region of the United States, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia, referred to in this study as The South. In an ideal study, participants from all HBCCs and PBCCs would be represented; however, that was not feasible given the scope of this

study. Since there was limited prior research on this specific topic, there was a limitation in accessing available scholarly literature, indicating a need for further development in the study area.

As a limitation, this study was time-bound. The time administrative leaders had to share was limited, and the study was time-bound based on the researcher's anticipated timeline. Interviews were only conducted once, which limited the depth of information collected.

Reflexivity

An essential part of this study was maintaining researcher reflexivity through a cycle of self-reflection, which created space for the researcher to clearly align the research with any assumptions and seek out potential consequences. Reflexivity is a way that qualitative researchers make meaning during the process of analyzing data to ensure data is revisited often to assemble the knowledge accrued against a measurement of assumptions (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Bruce et al., 2016; Smythe & Murray, 2000; Hickson, 2016). Considering sociality, temporality, and place allowed the researcher to conduct this study with reflexivity to shape each participant's story with the intention of meaning-making (Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

Chapter Summary

This study explored the lived experiences of predominantly Black institutional leaders within community colleges who have collaborated with external education partners to support, develop, and enhance equitable pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes. In order to tell the stories of this population, a qualitative narrative inquiry was designed using in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted, and audio/video was recorded using the Zoom platform, allowing the researcher to study and journal through notes and 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 the credibility of the transcripts, participants were approached to member-check their respective transcripts. The researcher also engaged with the research project's faculty advisor and peers to identify potential biases in the conclusions through peer debriefing. Data analysis employed Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative analysis and paradigmatic analysis to analyze the narratives used to further organize the findings into a report of common themes based upon conceptual foundations.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter provides findings from a narrative inquiry of eight executive administrators from Historically Black two-year colleges and predominantly Black two-year colleges who have partnered with external education entities. It tells the story of the administrators as they participated in supporting, developing, and enhancing equitable pathways to student credential attainment and employment outcomes.

Participants

This study utilized narrative inquiry to capture the experiences of eight executive administrators from Historically Black two-year colleges and predominantly Black two-year colleges in The South. The participants selected ranged in age from forty-five to sixty-four. Eighty-eight percent (*n=7*) of the participants were female, and twelve percent (*n=1*) were male. Thirty-eight percent (*n=3*) of the participants self-identified as Black, while sixty-two percent (*n=5*) self-identified as white. The participants‘ titles varied, but seventy-five percent (*n=6*) of the individuals were in top leadership positions, including president, vice president, and provost. Thirty-eight percent (*n=3*) of the participants in the study indicated a doctorate as their highest level of education completed, while sixty-two percent (*n=5*) indicated a master’s degree. Also, eighty-eight percent (*n=7*) of the participants considered themselves first-generation college graduates and twelve percent (*n=1*) did not. All of the participants had at least 25 years of professional experience. Sixty-two percent (*n=5*) of participants had been at their current institution for five years or less, while the others had been there for ten years or more. **Table 2** summarizes the participants’ descriptive demographic data, including race, gender, age range, first-generation status, highest education completed, total years experience, total years at current institution, and current role.

Table 2: *Summary of Participants' Demographics*

Pseudonym	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender Identity	Age Range	First Generation	Highest Education	Years Experience	Years at Institution	Current Role
Brandon	Black	Male	45-54	Yes	Doctorate	30	2	President
Carlotta	Black	Female	45-54	Yes	Doctorate	25	4	Dean
Charlotte	White	Female	45-54	Yes	Master's	28	1	Vice President
Kelly	White	Female	55-64	Yes	Master's	34	20	Associate Vice President
Nadia	White	Female	45-54	Yes	Master's	28	1	Vice President
Rita	Black	Female	55-64	Yes	Doctorate	30	18	Provost
Sheila	White	Female	45-54	Yes	Master's	30	12	Vice President
Traci	White	Female	45-54	No	Master's	25	5	Executive Director

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of HBCC and PBCC leaders in The South in partnership development with external education organizations. The following research question guided this inquiry:

What are the lived experiences of institutional leaders within historically Black and predominantly Black community colleges who have collaborated with external education

partners to support, develop, and enhance equitable pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes?

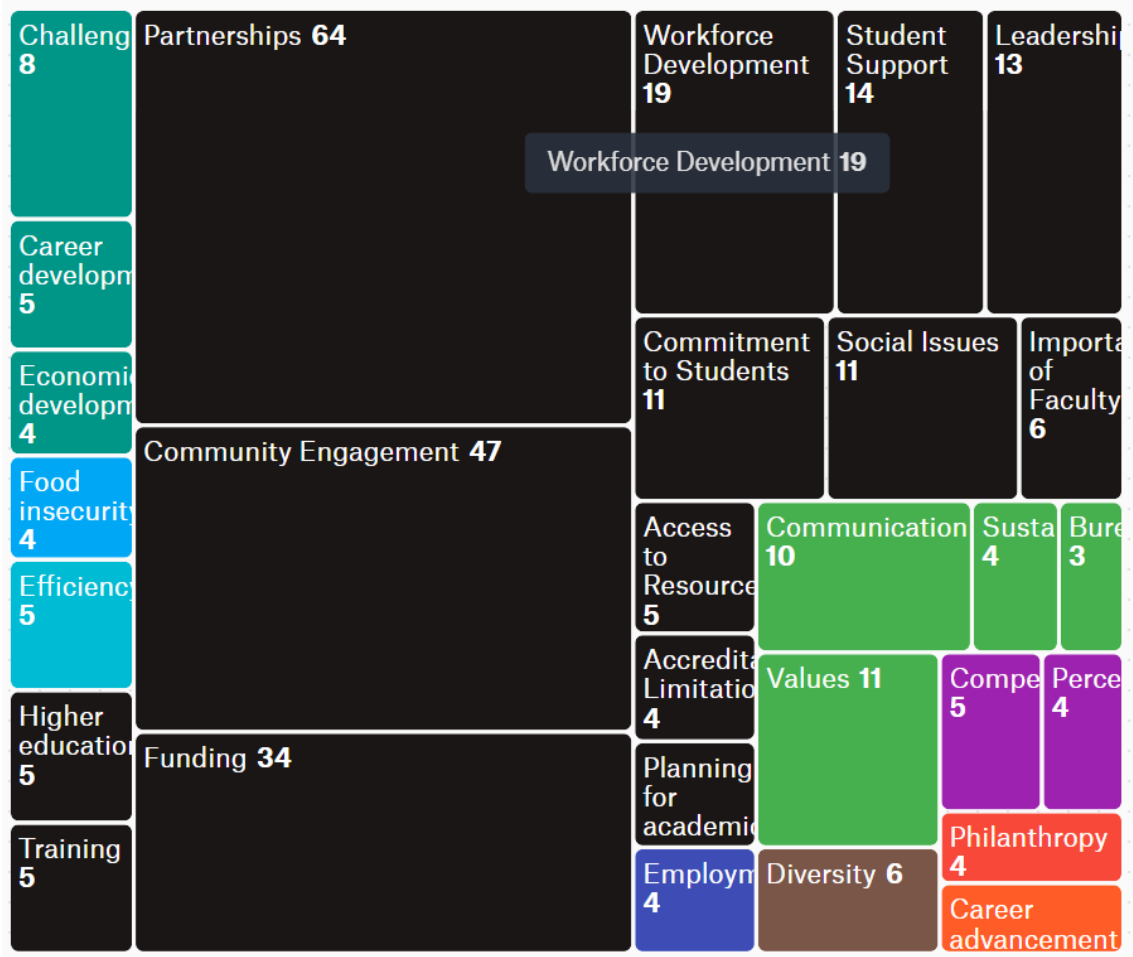
First, a brief description of each theme is provided, followed by the narratives of each participant, further organized by how each participant's experience contributed value to each distinctive theme. Next, this chapter presents the narratives of the unique experiences of eight administrative leader participants in this study. Each participant's narrative story is arranged with an introduction and description of the participant, and the findings are organized by themes based on their own unique experiences. These narratives were informed by the data collected from interviews, including direct quotes from participants, which may include slang, utterances, or changes in speaking patterns from narrative to narrative. Words such as "you know," "uh," "um," and "like" have been removed to enhance clarity in the narratives. Additionally, participants were invited to review their transcripts in a member checking process to confirm that their intended message was accurately captured and contributed to the research process's credibility and trustworthiness. This chapter will describe each participant, followed by each theme, and how each participant's experiences contributed individually to each theme.

Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative mode of analysis (narrative analysis) and paradigmatic mode of analysis (analysis of narratives) helped to frame the findings. A synthesis of each participant's narrative is provided. Further, for each participant, introduced by their pseudonyms, the paradigmatic mode of analysis was considered to explore the alignment of their experiences with resulting themes and subthemes when compared to the framework. Vignettes from each interview have been included to provide additional contextual detail.

Visualizing the data using charts and graphs allowed the researcher to conduct an iterative process of analyzing data and refining the labels to interpret findings. **Figure 1** shows

the final label distribution in a tree map. Over 200 labels were initially generated by ATLAS.ti, which the researcher reduced to 29. Consolidation efforts included grouping similar words to generate meaning within the same context.

Figure 1.1: *Final label distribution in a tree map*



Themes

The key themes identified in this study included the necessity of having *institutional values reflected in external partnerships*, addressing *systemic challenges facing higher education institutions*, building capacity for *equity in programming, funding, and curriculum design,* and *the importance of engaged leadership in partnership development*. A word cloud for

each theme was created based on the most common codes and categories to provide a visual representation of the evolution of codes from categories to themes.

Theme 1: ***Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships***

Institutional values reflected in external partnerships refers to the relationship between an institution's core values and priorities and the partnerships it forms with external organizations or entities. For the partnership to be effective and mutually beneficial, an institution's values and priorities should align with those of its external partners. This alignment ensures that the partnership is more likely to succeed and that both parties work toward common objectives. The interconnectedness of institutional values and external partners is essential to strategic partnership development. Partnerships should be more than just transactional arrangements.

Figure 2.1 provides visual context for the codes generated to confirm Theme 1**.** Some codes that helped shape this theme included partners, student success, integrity, resources, accountability, and innovation.

Figure 2.1: *Categories used to shape Theme 1*

Theme 2: ***Systemic Challenges Facing Higher Education Institutions***

Systemic challenges facing higher education institutions refers to the broad, underlying issues or obstacles that affect the entire system rather than individual institutions. These challenges could include funding constraints, access and equity barriers, outdated infrastructure, technological gaps, changing demographics, and evolving societal needs.

Figure 3.1 represents the second theme, which focuses on challenges. Funding cycles, market changes, technological advancements, student needs, cultural climate, racial discrimination, financial barriers, job attainment, state policy limitations, and others shaped this theme.

Figure 3.1: *Categories used to shape Theme 2*

Theme 3: ***Equity in Programming, Funding, and Curriculum Design***

Equity in programming, funding, and curriculum design refers to ensuring fairness and intentionality in developing and implementing educational programs, allocating resources, and designing curricula across diverse student populations. This means that all students, regardless of

their background, socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, gender, or ability, have equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities and support. Achieving equity involves

- identifying and addressing systemic barriers to access and success,
- promoting inclusive practices and
- providing targeted support to marginalized or underserved student groups.

Figure 4.1 highlights words associated with Theme 3. Some codes that helped shape this theme included people of color, women, diversity, equitable outcomes, accessibility, affordability, gender stereotypes, gender neutrality, and mentorship.

Figure 4.1: *Categories used to shape Theme 3*

Theme 4: ***The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development***

The importance of engaged leadership in partnership development refers to the significant role that committed leadership plays in fostering effective partnerships. Engaged leadership involves

- actively participating in and supporting partnership initiatives,
- communicating the vision and goals of collaborations and

- providing guidance and resources to facilitate their success.

Engaged leaders understand the value of partnerships in achieving organizational objectives and are invested in cultivating relationships with external stakeholders. They drive initiatives that benefit the institution, the students, and the broader community.

When considering ways to portray leaders' engagement as they shared experiences in partnership development, Figure 5.1 provides a word cloud depicting the associated categories of Theme 4**.** Some codes that helped shape this theme included energy, investment, community, buzz, entrepreneurship, partnership, development, synergy, advocacy, communication, and engagement.

Figure 5.1: *Categories used to shape Theme 4*

Brandon

Brandon’s experiences resonated with the phrase: Empowering student success, building partnerships, and navigating change because of his dedication to fostering student achievement, cultivating meaningful collaborations, and navigating the dynamic landscape of education and workforce development. Brandon, a first-generation graduate with a doctorate, was an

experienced leader with over 30 years of experience in higher education. He was serving in the role of college president at a predominantly Black college in The South and has served in this capacity for a little over a year.

Brandon was a proud community college graduate, as well. When asked why he works in the two-year college space, he responded:

> I am a product of the community college experience. When I graduated from high school, I went to a community college. The best decision that I'd ever made by going to that community college and in so doing was the first one in my family to get a two-year degree. So when I transferred to my four-year institution, I had knocked out like 64 of those credits transferring over. So I really only had two and a half years left thereafter to complete my four-year degree. But I'm a product of where we work.

His journey through the community college system allows him to exhibit a strong commitment to student success, which is apparent from his emphasis on addressing the needs of students, particularly regarding necessities such as food, transportation, and childcare. He shared the following with a smile:

> Working at a community college, again, the best decision that I have made. It was one where I was excited because I'm from where our students are. Having been able to identify with the needs of those students whether it's transportation or whether it's food and or whatever the insecurities there are, being able to identify. So I'm a product of it and then have just made this my mission. I just love the work that we do to really move the needle for student success.

As an ultimate goal, Brandon would like to see higher education in the two-year and four-year space be more accessible, affordable, and relevant to the needs of students and society. He spoke about his ideal educational alignment, saying:

> If I had a magic wand or if I had more time, I would start a two and a four-year year, but my four year would be an affordable model that we would design to make the college experience affordable with those students coming through would not have the debt ratio…Every college at the four year level is competing for students with bigger and brighter and better and building multiple million dollar facilities. Well that costs. The salary levels that are in our institutions, some of them, are just too high…And here's the Willy Wonka question. If the two-year colleges who have for the most part an affordable model for attending school, what can't the four years have an affordable model for attending school?

Theme 1: Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships

Brandon emphasized the significance of organizational values and priorities, such as student success, integrity, accountability, innovation, and excellence. When asked about factors that go into partnership decisions, he stressed the importance of partnering with businesses and organizations that align with these values by saying:

> So when you look at the values of our organization, and the priorities of our organization, does that match with the employer? Now if that is an employer that has a churn and burn mentality, meaning they only see their workforce as numbers, they only see their workforce as I'm just trying to get what I can get and then move on to the next. That's not a good partner for us, because our students are depending on us, to pipeline them into

> really great organizations. If that organization is doing nothing but churning and burning and not adding value to the community, we're not going to partner with them.

Business Expansion and Retention. For Brandon, workforce partners are vital to the region's success and reflect the college's success. The college must contribute to attracting new businesses to the region and retaining industry partners with a competent, skilled workforce. When asked about developing partnerships, he remarked:

> Obviously, the students that are leaving our institution are migrating to one of those companies in the private sector. So then the question is, are we meeting their needs, and if we are meeting their needs from a quantitative perspective, are we meeting that need from a qualitative perspective? Do those students have the competencies and skill sets to be able to do the job based on that employers requirements…It is so important that we be glued into the hiring needs of the region…When we're looking to partner with economic developers to bring new businesses into the region, that is also very important…We don't want to just recruit the businesses and then two, three years later, the businesses leave. Business retention means sustainability within economic development within a region. That means their sustainability, from a workforce perspective, is because of the very students that we helped to migrate to that organization.

Leveraging Institutional Resources With Mutual Benefit. When asked about an ideal partnership for his institution, Brandon recounted a conversation with a CEO about a potential partnership between their organizations from years earlier when he worked in Corporate America. The CEO indicated that their business should be earning $70 million but was only making $30 to $40 million due to the staffing gap. Brandon then proposed a partnership where he would help the CEO fill those positions, effectively closing the $30 million gap. In return,

Brandon asked if the CEO would invest $15 million in their organization. The CEO's response was positive. In thinking of new funding models, Brandon imagined the same for higher education, "where as a result of the pipeline of workforce, there is a percentage that comes back of dollars," similar to a commission.

Theme 2: Systemic Challenges In Higher Education

When asked about the challenges at the institution, Brandon believed that there is an oversaturation of higher educational institutions and that state and federal funds are “being divvied out like a deck of cards.” This model reduces funding for top performing institutions. He explained:

> When you look at the framework of schools, you're talking about private, two-year schools and four-year schools. You're talking about public two-year schools and four-year schools. You're talking about for-profit two-year schools and four-year schools. So there are just way too many schools in the marketplace...That is why the funding is strained…I believe that there should be some performance measures that tie into that funding, because if there is a school that is not performing, why would we give that school money from a state perspective? If you combine WIOA and the dollars that flow from the Department of Education and the Department of Commerce at the federal level, that's millions… That's a lot of wasted resources and divvying it out again, like a deck of cards with no real outcome. So where I'm looking to position our school is to be outcome driven…I believe that comprehensive funding should be there to support students where there is post-graduate success.

Lack of Support for Diversity and Equitable Opportunities. Also related to existing challenges that partnerships may help alleviate, Brandon spoke about the challenges faced by

institutions striving to create an inclusive and supportive environment for all students in the face of political pressures and agendas. He said, “There is right now an all out assault on organizations that promote diversity. There's an all out assault on equitable outcomes and opportunities for all.” Government policies and actions are hindering student progress toward achieving goals. He specifically mentioned the state of Florida as an example where such actions are taking place.

> So then you have states like Florida going ‘Oh, you're going to teach all this stuff that has nothing to do with being gainfully employed and nothing to do with advancing your skill sets to matriculate. Guess what we're gonna do. We're going to say, 'Well, you can't do X and you can't do Y.’’

The Speed of Change Within Higher Education. Additionally, Brandon recognized the need for the institution to be flexible and responsive to workforce needs. However, the funding cycles to build buildings and create programming do not "move at the speed of the market." Funding is not sustainable, and the educational processes take too much time. He said, "We have got to change our ways. We have to change our practices. We have to be more adaptable…We don't like change. We hate change. But there's no way to be innovative and not bring change.” He shared:

> The market that we're pipelining students into is so fluid. It ebbs and flows. So a conversation you're having today about a particular need in the market has now changed five minutes later…The advancement of technology is so great. So that means that as a college, the things that we are investing in to go into the buildings, the equipment are now antiquated as soon as we put them in that space….Unless they're sustainable

> funding, even the thing that we're calling the most innovative equipment is antiquated the moment it lands in that facility.

The Need for Funding to Meet Student Needs

Continuing the conversation around institutional challenges, Brandon referenced Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how outside factors affect students' cognitive abilities. He discussed the importance of prioritizing the holistic well-being of students and adapting educational models to meet their diverse needs better. Brandon remarked about how the student needs affect their persistence, saying:

> A lot of students have financial insecurities. There are food insecurities. There's transportation insecurities, and in some cases, their childcare insecurities…They're trying to work a part-time job or two, and they're trying to go to school. Something's gonna give. There's only so many hours a day. You're not going to go to school 100% of your time, when your time has to be parceled out. That is why we have got to meet the demands in a much different way.

Theme 3: Equity in Programming, Funding, and Curriculum Design

Brandon strongly desired to ensure that his institution effectively prepares students for success in high-demand, high-wage fields and success with pursuing bachelor's degrees. He believes in pursuing this goal with a reflective look at academic practices. He explained how partnerships can address institutional challenges, saying:

> Why do we have more non-people of color go into those higher demand fields higher wage fields, and then we've migrated some of the students of color to some fields where there's still demand, but it's low wage. Instead of us assessing those students and talking to them about career paths and and exposing them to various things, we just kind of

> locked them in…And as I looked at the data, there are more women in the counties we serve than there are men. That's facts. So you know what I did? I had to then do some self reflecting and looking at Hey, do we have women leading these high demand high wage fields, even in nontraditional spaces? And the answer is emphatically no. I brought that data before the college said hey, we got to do a better job. How can you have more women in all of our counties, and these women are not in these high demand, high wage fields? That is why I'm having conversations about cybersecurity and AI and STEM and healthcare to have equitable outcomes for all.

Shorter Pathways to Completion. Continuing his answer to challenges at the institution, Brandon added:

> Long ago, going to school for two or three years at a two-year school and another two or three years at a four-year school, well that's six years. There are families out there that can't wait six years before they can be gainfully employed. We must have shorter on and off ramps to enable that student to have success because of those insecurities…So the way that we have constructed higher ed really does need to be revamped. Because why does it take two years to get a two-year degree? Why? Why can't it be shorter than that?

Faculty Development. When asked about what kind of partnership Brandon would develop if he had a magic wand, his response included a scenario in which faculty could continue to develop outside of the classroom while still being paid:

> There's only so many hours in a day and if 100% of your time is dedicated for the classroom engagement experience, which is necessary, then how do we also not only grow our institutions, but how do we grow our faculty…still employed, won't be able to teach.

Theme 4: The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

When asked about his perception of how interested and willing external entities are to partner with his institution, Brandon stated, "So that's the stuff that, as a president, definitely wakes me up early in the morning." When pursuing partnerships and making connections, he must continuously reevaluate the readiness of the community and the college's board. He has gained the trust of his board members by helping to alleviate the college's deficit by millions of dollars in under three years. Brandon approaches them in business and industry partnerships like a "courting relationship." He said:

> You're not coming out the gate asking that person to marry you. That's a little crazy… There's got to be a relationship that is built…I have genuinely got to desire to help you make your organization better. Here's where the selfish part comes in. If I've made that student's life better, they're going to tell another student about my organization. If I've made that industry partner's life better, they're going to provide more support for my organization… Like any marriage or relationship, that partnership evolves over time. So something that was needed in a certain way at one point in time, in a different point in time, something else is needed. You've got to be able to evolve, you cannot stay the same.

Asking Questions and Networking. When asked how Brandon finds out about partnerships to pursue, Brandon used the word "curiosity." His curiosity drives innovation and motivates him to develop partnerships to solve problems. His answer reflects his strong desire to understand the needs of his students and the surrounding community:

> Your mission, your vision, your values naturally engage a curiosity. That curiosity drives conversations. 'Tell me about your organization. Where are you now? Where are you

> trying to be three to five years from now?' And now I got to look at the college to see where's our frame and how do we meet that need? Are we meeting that need? So I look at that as curiosity is really driving it…That curiosity of we've got to look at some better sustainable funding models, because what happens where states can't support colleges the way they've been supporting? What happens? Does the college stop operation? The driving force is the curiosity of what is the gap and what's the impact of that gap is not solved.

Brandon was committed to supporting, developing, and enhancing pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes by partnering with external entities that support student welfare and match the institution's values of student success, integrity, and community impact. His approach was deeply rooted in his personal experience as a community college graduate and his commitment to making higher education more accessible, affordable, and relevant. Brandon prioritized the well-being and interests of the students, acknowledging the challenges facing higher education, including funding constraints, political pressures, and the need for innovation and adaptability. He actively engages with external entities, fosters a culture of curiosity and innovation, and advocates for sustainable funding models to support student success.

Carlotta

Carlotta's experiences resonated with the phrase: Building bridges and transforming communities, which reflects her commitment to forming partnerships and collaborations that create opportunities for education and growth, ultimately positively impacting the community. Carlotta, a first-generation graduate with a doctorate, is an experienced professional with over 25 years of experience in higher education. She serves as a dean at a Historically Black College in The South and has served in this capacity for more than four years.

Carlotta is a proud graduate of the institution where she is currently employed. When asked why she chose to work at this institution, she responded:

> I have worked at a four-year university that was a traditionally white institution. I came over here and just kind of fell in love and found a community. So I would say that the mission of [Queens College] more closely aligned with my own personal mission of education, which I feel that it should be open access to everyone. I would also add that this is the only Historically Black College in the area, here in my state. And it means a lot to this community. When my nephew gets here in the fall, he'll be the fourth generation of my family to attend this college.

She is a patient yet tenacious leader who is willing to go after opportunities for her institution that will provide critical opportunities for student exposure and success no matter the perceived challenges she may face. When asked about challenges she may have faced in developing partnerships, she replied:

> I like to build relationships, and some of them just take longer to build than others. So I don't necessarily see that as a challenge. It's taking us longer. We're gonna get there, because that's the goal that I have in mind. But just some of them take longer than others. I'm a see the glass half full type of gal. So I'm not seeing that necessarily as a challenge…I might just have to visit you more often.

Theme 1: Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships

Carlotta recognizes the impact of the college's ability to produce skilled graduates on programmatic success and workforce gaps. She speaks about the nursing shortage in her area and beyond, saying, "We have six hospitals within our service area. And then we have people that are coming outside of our service area wanting to have access to our students because there is a

shortage." Proudly, she described her institution as "a nurse factory." They can educate many nursing students, but challenges still exist. Carlotta explained in response to a question about partnership challenges:

> All of our students have to have clinicals, practicums, real world experiences… There is a local hospital here where we do a lot of our clinicals. They want to branch off into nursing apprenticeships with us. This would be an opportunity for our nurses to get paid. They would be their employees while they're doing their clinicals. It sounds like a wonderful win-win situation. But I do not have the manpower right now to run that… Yes, we see the benefits, not only to you who are having workforce shortages, but also to our students who can earn money, because most of them are low-income first generation students.

Workforce Investment in Training Facilities. Carlotta discussed the local workforce partners' perceptions of the institution. The institution is known for producing good employees, so much so that the industry has made significant contributions. For Carlotta, [Queens College] is perceived as not having as much access to resources or providing as much quality education as their counterparts. However, she stated, "Despite our humble beginnings, and what people may perceive as what they think they know about HBCUs or things like that, we got it going on over here in terms of access to the latest and the greatest." She continued describing two of the latest industry contributions:

> We have state of the art facilities…We just opened an 80,000 square foot manufacturing center. In October we opened a state of the art healthcare facility… And some of that is thanks to our partners who make monetary contributions to these facilities, to laboratories, and to providing equipment for us…You know, a million dollars goes a very

> long way at an institution like ours. It means a lot to the reputation and the perception of this institution. In our own community, sometimes it's people who are right down the street that don't necessarily know what goes on here.

Theme 2: Systemic Challenges In Higher Education

Carlotta is highly aware of the partnership challenges within her institution. She described funding challenges from the state for dual credit learning, which was limiting partnerships with the high schools in the area. She described developing a dual credit partnership by saying, “It took several years of research, numerous conversations at the system office level, individual high schools leadership meetings, and surveys to the students and the parents” to find out the overall interest in dual credit healthcare programs. Ultimately, the institution’s office of Early College had to apply for competitive grant funding offered by the system office. Carlotta described that complex process:

> They set up competitive grants that we had to go after the money, tell them how we were going to use it, and who are the beneficiaries. Were we going to be getting buy-in and support from all of the systems that are around us? We didn't leave anyone out. We went to the independent systems. We got MOUs with homeschool coverings…

Rurality and Cultural Climate. When asked about instances where partnerships may have been terminated, Carlotta spoke about a partnership with a rural school. The school lay within the college’s service area, though the round trip was 110 miles. Carlotta described it as:

> …not a good 110 miles. It's like backwoods. You know, you would probably pass houses that have very large Confederate flags flying in the yard. It was that kind of travel where you hoped you didn't need to stop at a gas station or something along the way.

Additionally, Carlotta described the local community as "the haves and the have nots…The 'haves' go to these little academies and private schools around the city." She described these students as high performing and not likely to attend her institution based on the negative perceptions of two-year colleges.

Theme 3: Equity in Programming, Funding and Curriculum Design

Dual credit programs are still being developed in Carlotta's service area. Today, almost 30% of the enrollment is dual enrollment students, but it took significant effort from several entities. When asked about the process of partnership development, Carlotta spoke about the primary concern of accessibility and affordability issues for students:

> We are in an area that is urban, has high poverty, low college going rates, lots of low-income first-generation students. So we knew that these students would not be able to afford this dual enrollment. So it's like, okay, how do we provide them with a wonderful opportunity to get a head start on their post-secondary education, and not just dangle something in front of them that was not accessible to them, or achievable.

Gender Nonconformity in Healthcare Fields. When discussing institutional challenges that may be alleviated with partnerships, it was essential for Carlotta to think about the traditional stereotypes associated with gender in healthcare. She described her thoughts around diversity equity, and inclusion in dual credit offerings:

> I wanted to put a Health Information Technology program at one of his high schools. So they had a thriving CNA program, but it was all girls and maybe two boys. I was like, from an equity lens, I would like to offer something health related to the gentleman…They're on the computer. So I said electronic health records is booming. You can work from anywhere as long as you have reliable internet service… We were able to

> put two courses there this past fall term. So we had over 50 students, the majority of which were young men.

Theme 4: The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

Carlotta emphasized the importance of relationship-building, effective communication, and having a data-driven approach as the leadership qualities needed to develop and sustain partnerships. When asked about some challenges working with partners, she shared about leadership efforts to rebuild trust with a local partner after the institution's performance caused a rift. She acknowledged, "It is taking some time to do that. But that was something that really a decision should have been made not to continue the partnership if we could not fulfill it rather than to not do a good job at it." Carlotta strives for "frank, and open and honest conversations" about the institution's and the partner's capacity to create win-win situations for everyone involved.

Additionally, Carlotta relies on data to inform partnership development efforts. She discussed analyzing trends, identifying opportunities, and making data-driven decisions to strengthen partnerships. When asked how she discovers partnership opportunities to pursue, she stated:

> There are all different types of ways that we discover potential partners…We rely a lot on the labor market data...That's a great way to either strengthen our current partnership that might be a little weak or to develop a new ones.

Carlotta focused on supporting, developing, and enhancing pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes by seeking partnerships that transform communities and promote access to education for all. She prioritizes relationship-building, effective communication, and data-driven decision-making over making promises she cannot keep due to

human capital restraints at her institution. Her dedication to building meaningful partnerships, addressing systemic challenges, promoting equity, and exhibiting strong leadership is evident in the significant time and effort she spends to nurture relationships and build trust and rapport with partners who can help address stereotypes and barriers to access within her community.

Charlotte

Charlotte's experiences resonated with the phrase: Creating Opportunities, Changing Lives because of her focus on economic development, providing educational opportunities, and addressing systemic issues that disenfranchise individuals and communities from achieving their full potential. Charlotte has obtained a master's degree and is an experienced institutional advancement professional with over 28 years of experience in higher education. She serves as vice president at a predominantly Black college in The South and has served in this capacity for just under a year. Charlotte is a proud first-generation college graduate, and according to her, "I know what that means to make a difference for your future and your family's future."

Charlotte spent several years working in a university system but found it frustrating that change seemed to take so long. She compared the speed of change in the university space to the speed of turning around a big cruise ship. She finds fulfillment working in higher education but genuinely enjoys the technical system because it is "more reactive to the environment and the needs of the community." In addition, she loves seeing the direct impact of her work on the students. In her own words:

> I was becoming increasingly frustrated with the distance between me and the difference that I was making… In this role, I can just write a check…I don't have to go through that kind of rigmarole to make it happen…The local community bank gave $10,000 and it got all the GED students through their exams. Now those GED students are able to get jobs

> or they're able to enroll on our for credit side and advance their careers and take care of their families…I do this work because I can change lives and now I can see that I'm changing lives.

Charlotte's passion goes beyond providing traditional education. Her goal is to increase economic development and social progress in her community. She shared that people are afraid to come to her side of town due to the vagrancy and violence that exist. She recounted a story of a young teenage boy killed in the middle of the night as he went outside to pick up a food delivery. Charlotte wants to see her community thriving again. As she puts it:

> We don't end up with blighted buildings. We've got a mall that was abandoned years ago that is within a mile or two of our campus, and it's just festering empty hull of the building. And our downtown needs to be revitalized…So we are also very interested in helping our community develop this area of the county so that it becomes a vibrant place that people have economic opportunities for jobs whether they're our students or not. People in the community feel like that's someplace that I can go and have dinner. That's someplace that I could go shop, or that's someplace where I can go see an accountant. Maybe that is someplace that I'll go get my hair and nails done.

Theme 1: Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships

Charlotte advocates for defining roles, contributions, and expectations in developing partnerships. When asked about describing the development of a partnership at her institution, Charlotte discussed a successful partnership with a local hospital, resulting in real-world experiences for students. The focus is on providing students with practical training in a real world environment, making them better prepared for future careers. She states:

> Shortly before I started, a conversation was had between the president of our school and the CEO of one of the local hospital systems and the hospital system coming off of COVID no longer really had a use for some of the spaces…And like so many healthcare systems, they were struggling with recruiting nurses. We have a couple of nursing programs, and these two people came together, each with challenges that they were trying to resolve. For us in terms of getting students scholarships, because so many of them have financial hardships… It was determined that the hospital would offer the college the basically vacant hospital building…For us, it has been a way of helping to put our students into a more real world dynamic for their training… Not just nursing students but also with the other students in the Allied fields who are working together because when you work in a hospital, or really in any medical field, you don't just work with other nurses you work with other specialities as well.

Filling Existing Partnerships Gaps with Workforce Investments. Charlotte referenced several programs for which students do not have to pay tuition. According to Charlotte, "the state has identified several areas that are of high priority to get people into the work field and to attract more industry into the state. The students who go into these programs don't pay tuition." However, Charlotte admits there are still many gaps. The automotive program is one of the tuition-free programs. However, the existing training facilities need to be bigger to meet demand and upgraded to match the current automotive technology in the field. To this end, Charlotte answered the question about whether external entities are willing to partner with her college:

> This is a former automotive dealership that we purchased, and we're raising the money to renovate it. We are talking to manufacturers from global manufacturers, we are talking to collision people from all over the country who are coming here to see this site and see

> what we're talking about.… We're building an automotive tech center that is going to include basically every kind of automotive tech that you can think of. It's going to expand our space by about six and a half times the amount of space that we have right now. It's going to include not just traditional automotive tech, but EV, diesel, power, sports, collision, and repair. Everything that you can think of… In addition to that, it's going to have live work where people can come and get basic services, oil changes, and all that so the students can get that experience. They can get experience as sales writers and interact with the customers

Benefits and Challenges of Partner Reputations. For Charlotte, there are always benefits and potential risks associated with partnerships. She gave examples of how her institution has been fortunate to find a partner with what she describes as an "extremely high reputation for excellence…and the fact that we stand next to them, we're colored by their reputation." Being located explicitly in The South, with its history of slavery, segregation, and prejudice, she is always considering the potential for student impact in partnerships, never wanting her students to feel like the institution, in her words, "sold them out." She expressed her desire to end the practice of naming buildings after major contributors for practical reasons of buy-outs and mergers and moral reasons as well. Her local area has changed dramatically due to Confederate-named military installations or institutions that benefitted philanthropically from Jeffrey Epstein. Charlotte reflected on a previous experience:

> We have, through our alumni recognition program, someone who was nominated.Very worthy, and will likely be honored in the future but was caught up in a court case that was getting a lot of publicity at the time. And we made the decision to forego that award at that time because we didn't want the headline to be 'this person gets award from our

> institution' and then the headline below it is 'hauled off to jail'. So I think that it's important for institutions to realize when you go into a partnership, that you need to know as much as you can about who you're partnering with to make sure that you want to be colored with the good part of their reputation, and not with the poor part of the reputation.

Theme 2: Systemic Challenges In Higher Education

Charlotte is very cognizant of the systemic issues related to race that play a part in her everyday work. After moving to [a metropolitan, liberal city], she visited her hometown after being gone for 23 years. She came away with a sense of frustration that nothing had changed about the community's views and actions related to race. When asked about challenges in developing partnerships, she talks about seeing similar issues when writing for grants or fundraising. She finds that people would rather not face the issues of racial discrimination and inequity. She said:

> I'm like, we keep talking about the same things. We keep raising money with United Way. God bless the United Way and the work that it does, but they're addressing the same problem. Every year. And we're not solving the problems. And so that gets me frustrated, when we still have people who are facing the same problems that the generation before faced, and the generation before that faced. Are we getting better…In my work right now, it's better for me to get the money right now than to say we need to fix the system. So it's frustrating to say I still need money for scholarships. I still need money for transportation...If we fix the system for some of us, we fix the system for all of us.

Financial Barriers to Completion and Job Attainment. Students do not have to pay tuition for the programs considered crucial for workforce development and attracting industry to

the state. Charlotte sees this as a major stepping stone to credential attainment, but not all programs are funded. Even for those that are, Charlotte continues working to raise funds because the students need more support. She said, "Our students are struggling economically, they're struggling with challenges that a traditional university student may not face in terms of their responsibilities in the home, whether that's for siblings or for children being independent as very young people." When asked about challenges that partnerships have the potential to fix, she further stated:

> Tuition is covered by programs… Just having students who come to us with very limited financial means, who are usually coming to us with challenges like transportation, childcare, that go beyond just 'Can I pay my tuition when it's due', but then can I buy my books. Talking about the nursing program, those students have an additional $10,000 out of pocket beyond tuition and fees for uniforms and equipment and insurance and they have to get vaccinations every year. So, you know, it's very hard for people to understand the extreme financial need that most of our students have, and the challenges. Sometimes those are racialized stereotypes that they apply to that, but it's not it's not necessarily about students being lazy or quitters or unmotivated. It is really that they are dealing with so many things and so many variables that affect how they're able to motivate their lives.

Completion is Not The Final Measure of Success. Charlotte worries about what happens to students who complete but still cannot work despite completing a program. To quote Charlotte, "If a student can't go out and work, and they've just spent all this time and all these resources, sacrifices that they've made for themselves or their families. Then we haven't accomplished our goal yet." For example, speaking on challenges at the institution, she shared about the situation of some students who complete the nursing program:

> I wrote a grant recently, trying to get money for those nursing students, because when they finish, they have to take a licensing exam. And I don't remember the exact amount but I'm gonna say it's, it's $500 to take the exam. So they have the extra $10,000 in costs associated with the program. And not all of them are scholarshipped by that hospital because they have to make agreements and all that. So you managed to get through that you're not able to work while you're doing some of our programs, including the nursing program. So you can't make any money. You're a single parent, and you get done. And the sooner you take that exam, the more likely you are to pass it. You can't start working until you pass a licensing exam, but somehow you gotta go make money to get $500 to take the exam. So we wrote a grant recently to try to get funding so that the next two cohorts or nurses wouldn't have to pay for that licensing exam. And unfortunately, we were denied.

State Policy Limitations and Underfunding. Charlotte often works with partners with relatively unlimited resources and little oversight. It is sometimes difficult for the partners to understand the minutia of working within state systems. She said the external partner is ready to "just get it done," they have no idea that the college has not had a tuition increase in seven years but was also mandated to give everyone a raise. She continued that the partners are unaware it could take up to "six weeks just to add a vendor in the system" so the college can buy the equipment with the money the partner just donated. Charlotte has to find ways to manage partner expectations so as not to put the collaborations at risk.

Misconceptions About Community and Technical Colleges. Charlotte has not only inherited a community that does not feel safe at some of their campuses but also a board of trustees that knows little about what the college has to offer the community. She endeavors to

change the perception and knowledge of what [Noble College] is doing and what the institution can do for the community. Continuing to speak about challenges at her institution, Charlotte said:

> In our community, people just don't come to our campuses, and so they don't know what we're doing. So, I have an advisory board that works with me because I head up our foundation, and I think there's only one alumnus on that trustee board. It's all community leaders, but only one actually went to school with us. So they don't really have an understanding of what we do or who our students are. They come to the campuses regularly, and I like to take them to different sites when we're having meetings, when I'm doing events, whether it's thanking donors or raising money. I want to bring them here because I think it's really important for people to come and see who we are, so they can understand what we're trying to accomplish.

Theme 3: Equity in Programming, Funding, and Curriculum Design

Charlotte has spent some time studying feminism and has even spent some time studying in Europe. She says this knowledge and experience led her to think of things differently. She believes that our education and social systems are not fair to men or women. She wonders why gender limits choices. She explained:

> If we had a system where men could choose to do what they really want to do, where we didn't say male nurse in some derogatory way. If you could just be a nurse, regardless of your gender, if you could just be a stay at home parent, regardless of your gender. If you could be a dad who's actually engaged with your family, if you could be a husband who's actually engaged in the home. That's as important as women being able to have economic opportunities and education opportunities.

She believes that people make choices about what they want to do with their lives based on what they see. Charlotte talked about her service area saying:

> There are a lot of opportunities for people who are going to work in hair and nails, especially as a huge growing field right now…But I suspect that one of the reasons that that program is so well enrolled is because that's what our students see…And the students who do that, we want to make sure we're trying to develop to be entrepreneurial because most of them are entrepreneurs when they come out... So we're working on some entrepreneurial programs… They see barbershops because we have a huge barbering program as well. They see nail salons. They see people doing that in their homes as business. And so that's what they know. But they don't know that they can come, and for free, become a nuclear technician and go work in an organization where they don't have to cover their own overhead or provide their own insurance.

When asked about an ideal partnership, Charlotte imagined a successful partnership that is "cohesive across a student's life range as a student, if you will. So how can we engage the middle schooler, the high schooler, and the student coming to be more exposed to the variety of programs that we can teach students."

Theme 4: The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

Charlotte stated that the president is one of her main reasons for working at [Noble College]. She has known him for about 12 years and has watched him advance in his career. She described him as a visionary and was impressed with what he has done for the institution's reputation in just over three years. Charlotte knows that one of the keys to his success is his level of community engagement:

> It's incredibly important to me, for people in this community to have a better understanding of who we are as an institution, and what we do…I think my president is on half the boards in the community. You know, get your leadership engaged across the community in meaningful ways. But not just for show. Really engage, and it takes effort. It's not without work. Things don't happen magically although I joke about my president and his magic fundraising capabilities. It really is about sincerity, and working hard and bringing in those people.

Influence and Reputation. When asked how interested external entities are in partnering with her institution, Charlotte believes that partners are very excited to partner with them because of their president's influence and reputation. In her opinion:

> I've had great leaders and I've really benefited from having terrific bosses but this one more than any other. I just walked behind him and pick up the money that people throw on the floor…It's hard to get your first million dollar gift. It's easy to get the next one because once someone sees that someone else is investing in you, then they're like,' ooh, that's a good place for me to be'.

Charlotte's experiences supporting, developing, and enhancing pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes have involved fundraising and seeking partnerships within the community that can advance educational opportunities, empower students, and foster economic and social progress. Charlotte understands the transformative power of education and is passionate about ensuring that all students, particularly those facing economic and social challenges, have access to educational opportunities that can positively impact their lives and futures. She knows her community's political and cultural landscape and carefully curates her

approach depending on the potential partner. Her institutional leadership has a strong reputation and has attracted valuable partners.

Kelly

Kelly's experiences resonated with the phrase: Uplifting Communities Through Education and Industry Collaboration because she believed in collaboration between education and industry and empowering individuals through accessible opportunities for learning and career advancement. Kelly has obtained a master's degree and is an experienced workforce development professional with over 34 years of experience in higher education. She currently serves as associate vice president at a predominantly Black college in The South and has served at this institution for 24 years.

Kelly is from a small community where she remarked, "If you don't do what you're supposed to do, your grandma was gonna know at church on Sunday." Her journey of working in the community college began when she was hired as an internship coordinator for a [federally funded] grant. She has found a love for workforce development and has a passion for increasing the participation of minorities in engineering fields. She believes in reaching out to students early to help them find career opportunities rather than just jobs. She shared a proud student success moment:

> Part of my first job was the internship program that fell under what was called the industry consortium. I got to work with lots of folks from industry and go out to meet with HR and all of those people…So there was a feedback loop. I would place a student, and they'd go interview…And they would come back, and the industry would tell us how the students did, what they needed to improve on. So that helped us to grow it…. And it

> was good for our students…It's been 20 years. Now those students are upper management and are hiring our graduates and running those businesses.

Kelly is beginning to learn how privileged she is. Working in higher education has made her aware of how much students struggle just to stay in school. She shared:

> Many of our students struggle with food insecurity. I know that there are homeless people, but I had no idea that our students struggled. I think most of us aren't aware of all the things that people struggle with…I tell my friends and family all the time, we are so middle class, we don't know what it's like to struggle. Until I got into education…

Theme 1: Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships

Kelly has spent years developing relationships with industry partners in the area. When asked which entities to partner with, she bases the decision on the institutional values of student success and workforce development. It is straightforward for her. She commented:

> Years ago, I had somebody call me and wanted to demonstrate a little robotic inventory machine for a local company. I said, can our students and faculty see it? And they said, Absolutely, we're going to bring other industry to see it as well. I said, if you're getting industry on our campus for our students and faculty to interact with, I'm good… The engineer who brought the machine sat down with the students and did a 30 minute impromptu lesson on the coding behind it… So it was a great experience all the way around. Last year, that same company came to us and said, we have this fancy inventory system and we would like to give you one to go in your facility for y'all to utilize. It's a $130,000 piece of equipment.

Considering Students' Experiences When Partnering. Kelly's work positions her institution as an excellent partner for workforce partnerships, providing numerous opportunities

for students to engage in employment or gain new work experience. However, Kelly carefully protects her students from opportunities that could derail their educational efforts. Continuing the discussion around making partnership decisions, she explained:

> We also have folks all the time who will call and ask if we have students who will work for free just to get some experience building a website or something…We need to make sure that nobody's intentionally trying to take advantage. It sounds like a great opportunity to them. But when people say surely your students will do it for free, I'm like, they can't afford gas money… This was a big company and I'm like, 'I know how much you paid for commercials during the Superbowl, you can afford to pay a student to work for you'... I think to your original question, that if you kind of keep it focused on your values, it gives you a framework to say, tell me how it supports students and the workforce.

Theme 2: Systemic Challenges In Higher Education

Kelly has worked at [George Carver College] for 20 years and shares that she was unaware of student challenges with homelessness, transportation, childcare, and food insecurity until recently. When asked about institutional challenges that partnerships may help alleviate, she shared two stories:

> He was basically homeless and didn't have an automobile… He was the smartest kid in his class, and he was gonna drop because his wife left and he had to move, 50 miles away, and he doesn't have a job. Within a week, we had him a job…They would deliver his paychecks here. And one day, he didn't come get it. Something came up. I was off that day. It was a Friday afternoon, and I was actually taking a nap. And he called me saying I gotta get my paycheck… He said, I just really needed my check and to get cash.

> I'm at McDonald's. It's the one on the highway that has the playground inside. He said that's my son's favorite thing to do when we have the money. This is a man who's kid just thinks Disney World for him is going to McDonald's. I gotta go get that paycheck.
>
> We had a young woman walking down a road towards the highway. I stopped and asked can I give you a ride? Where are you going? She said, I'm going to the bus station. She lives in another state about 45 miles away. And she was coming from this program. And so she was walking. So she took the bus. And then she got to the main bus station. And she walked to the college, it's like a three mile walk down the highway. And then she walks back because she needs to get the bus back to her hometown, so she can get to work tonight. That's some perseverance there.

Blindness to Student Needs. Kelly admits that she did not know about the magnitude of the student struggles on her campus. She remarked, "We hear about students being homeless, there's some shady hotels nearby. And we know that sometimes students are living there…We have transportation issues. I didn't realize that for a long time." Many initiatives that once existed such as a food pantry or a clothes closet had a brief existence on campus, but suffered during COVID and have not returned. Recently, her institution has moved toward using data to drive decisions about how to help students.

Childcare is another severe student need. Kelly discusses a potential employer visiting campus and ridiculing students for bringing their children to job interviews. Kelly described that employer as "kind of brutal." The employer explained that if someone brings children to an interview, they will not be hired because the employer will assume they cannot provide childcare enough for work. Kelly shared, "It's more likely that we would say, how can we help you find childcare for that child because we now know what barriers there are."

Theme 3: Equity in Programming, Funding, and Curriculum Design

Kelly recognizes the need to get students to work as soon as possible and advocates for more funding for practical, short-term training. She speaks about more accessible short-term training programs, such as Certified Nursing Assistant courses, which can act as stepping stones to higher-paying careers. This approach allows individuals to enter the workforce promptly and build their skills progressively. When asked about what would be included in an ideal partnership, Kelly stated:

> They're working towards it, and that is the ability to use Pell short term programs. For example, CDL for truck drivers... Within five weeks, we could get them a CDL. And they could make $100,000 a year. That's the kind of thing to me, if you want to really make a difference in somebody's life.

Need For Mentorship. Kelly also recognizes that students can often be pigeonholed into career choices because they need more exposure to possibilities. The college received a grant for a mentorship program for females and minorities in STEM, which Kelly finds essential. According to her:

> I think we would need to do a better job figuring out what people want to be. 90% of students who came here said, I'm going to be a nurse. And they weren't. But what other opportunities are there that are related to healthcare? They know nurse and they know welder. Those you can picture easily. But engineering technician, they might not even understand. The thing is, there’s money there, they just don't even know it.

Theme 4: The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

When asked about external entities' eagerness to partner with the institution, Kelly remarks that she has noticed a shift in the institution's perception, which has led to more industry

partnerships and grant opportunities. The new president, the second president she has worked with in her 24 years at this institution, has been there for two years. He leads with his belief in education and the power of education to change people's lives because he has experienced it. She continued:

> Industry became more open to working with us. I think, partly because they were being listened to…I think a lot of people's perspectives have changed a lot, at least in my perspective of it over the last 20 years.

Kelly is committed to supporting, developing, and enhancing pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes by aligning partnerships with institutional values, advocating for student needs, increasing awareness of student challenges, and fostering collaborative partnership development. She prioritizes opportunities that provide meaningful experiences for students, such as industry interactions and hands-on learning opportunities. Through her work, Kelly has become more attuned to these challenges and strives to address them through institutional initiatives and partnerships. She believes that industry professionals' feedback and mentorship help guide students toward successful careers.

Nadia

Nadia's experiences resonated with the phrase: Building Communities and Championing Equity in Education due to her dedication to addressing disparities, removing barriers, and engaging with the broader community to secure resources. Nadia, a first-generation graduate with a master's, is an experienced leader with over 28 years of experience in higher education. She serves as vice president at a predominantly Black college in The South and has served in this capacity for over a year.

Nadia grew up in the community which she now serves. She tirelessly advocates for solutions to student needs and believes two-year institutions are the best training ground. She said:

> A two-year institution is an area that really builds community for students and helps them get prepared, especially for our first-gen students who its an entirely new process. And so a two-year community college or technical college has the bandwidth and I would say the passion to help walk students through processes versus a four-year institution where you're coming in with assumptions that you already know how to navigate.

Theme 1: Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships

Nadia understands that developing partnerships in service of a PBI means that the partnership must be focused on serving the target audience, continuously evaluating, "Does this partnership focus on the students who may be the most challenged in retention and completion. And does this address their needs and potential barriers." When asked about an existing partnership at the institution, Nadia shared about a current partnership with [a national foundation]:

> In particular, they've been working with two-year colleges to identify basic needs and emergency needs for students that are barriers to persistence and retention…They want to help students not default on their loans and things of that sort. And so they have a free financial literacy component. But what they've also done is they have allocated $10,000 a year that our students, just at our institution alone, can apply for emergency aid. So this is not tuition, this is not books, this is not school emergency. This is, I have a flat tire and I can't afford a new tire. It's, I am not paying my water bill because I have to pay my power bill. It's, I got a reduction in hours because I joined the nursing program. And so now I

> need help with my mortgage. And these are basic needs emergency funds… But a third branch to their support is they have funded our student food pantry… They have provided us with basically an additional $10,000 a year to stock our food pantry…We average pretty much a 75% persistence rate of students who use the pantry.

Disconnecting From Partnerships. Nadia is currently working with limited human capital resources and is facing challenges with maintaining services and programs with existing resources. In light of this, she spoke about a partnership with [a national advocacy organization] that lacked clarity and effectiveness for the institution. When asked about challenges with partnerships, she said:

> It was more about the ambiguity of what we were being asked to do and what they were providing. With a partnership with [a different national education group], we had a very clear understanding of the tasks of both sides of the agreement in the partnership. With [a national advocacy group], we joined that with a cohort, and it just became too ambiguous. Because we were doing multiple things at once, initiative overload, and because of the ambiguity of it, we weren't sure if it was worth our time, because we have very limited human capital resources…And so the resources that became available to us were great when we could get to them… Their mission was right on track with ours…It was just the implementation that we were getting from them that left us wanting more…We really had to focus on what we could see was going to give us an actionable plan in the end.

Theme 2: Systemic Challenges Facing Higher Education Institutions

Nadia's institution serves a four-county service area that is predominantly a minority area. Post-COVID enrollment continues to be up and down, which is a big concern for her.

Funding for the institution is inconsistent and not sustainable. The PBI designation is at risk every funding cycle. Nadia shared:

> Predominantly Black institutions have to be 40% African American Black? And depending on how your recruitment and your admission teams are working in our DEI dismantlement, we have to be conscientious of that... Because if we lose that designation, are we losing funding? Possibly, we're losing our eligibility to apply for certain funding…We want to keep this designation because we're also serving our community...I think we may actually get more support if people knew what minority serving institutions meant. Because I don't know if people automatically reflect that their colleges reflect their communities.

When discussing challenges at her institution and inconsistent funding, Nadia discusses a grant acquired during COVID-19 to support a tutoring center. After the grant cycle ended, the institution could not continue funding it at the same level. Another previous grant provided a laptop lending program, but it was not sustained either.

Academic Preparedness. Nadia continues to seek support in the institution's efforts to address academic preparedness and digital literacy. During COVID, many academic testing requirements were removed to eliminate the completion time barrier for students. The testing requirement has not returned to the admissions process. Nadia noted:

> It's an ongoing challenge because we are seeing a lot of students not being academically college ready. And removing DVS courses has helped students enroll in for credit courses, but the completion rate is there…I think that has been a major challenge. Because if we have students coming in, who may not be ready for academic level, or

> college level courses, and we don't have the tutoring and learning resources immediately in place, I feel like we're doing a disservice.

Staffing and Infrastructure. Nadia is proud that her institution has strong programming for student life and student support. She runs a small department of six people. She highlights that the department owns "diversity, inclusion, accessibility, Title Nine, the basic needs pantry, the student support team, student organizations, new student orientation, and the clothes closet. When asked about what an ideal partnership would look like at [Sunny State College], she stated:

> We have the programming, we just don't have the staff to be able to spread the current programming. So I think sometimes it would be grant funding for employees for the current operations.

Another area that would be addressed in her ideal partnership would be basic infrastructure. Nadia remarked:

> We are working out of buildings that are 50 years old, 60 years old. In some cases, it's the basic infrastructure that needs the help. Because if we have a strong IT network, then that is empowering the rest of the campus to blossom from that.

Theme 3: Equity in Programming, Funding, and Curriculum Design

In speaking about Nadia's perception of external entities' interest in partnering with the institution, she feels the interest is there. However, the interests are driven by what is popular or in the news. This type of interest tends to exclude students who need support. Nadia shared this example:

> We may get multiple hospitals and doctors offices who want to contribute to health sciences scholarships. Fantastic. Because they're wanting to do it, and so is everybody else. Because they hear there's a nursing shortage, there's a medical assisting shortage.

> There is. But they also need to know there's so much state and federal aid already going to those students. It's the other students that need support…The students who are not receiving a lot of aid or a lot of attention are our general Associate of Arts and Associate of Science students, because they're there on a transfer plan. And so I want more scholarships dedicated to them, because their goals take longer to get to and we don't want them to have to start off with debt…I want our outside partners, especially if they're donors, to recognize all students in that case, and to be very conscientious of not putting preferences or restrictions on the dollars received.

Theme 4: The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

Nadia is aggressive and proactive in seeking partnerships for student resources and support. Data driven decision making is crucial for her in understanding the existing gaps and mapping out as many details as possible before pursuing a partnership. According to Nadia, she discovers potential partners by looking across the higher education landscape at other institutions that have created successful partnerships that reflect meeting needs similar to those of her institution. She stays abreast of the nuances of certain corporations in the local community. She reflected on what she learned about [a major retailer]:

> Here in my town, our local [major retailer] decides who they can donate to. It doesn't go up through a regional office or anything like that. So at the new year, we received approximately about $5,000 from two [major retailers] to help fund our snack pantry as well.

Overall, Nadia's journey in supporting, developing, and enhancing pathways to student success is a blend of rewarding experiences, challenges to overcome, continuous learning, and moments of celebration. She loves to see students overcome obstacles, persist in their education,

and achieve their goals. She actively searches for avenues to help students access resources, succeed academically, and help her community thrive. She is willing to challenge stakeholders and potential partners to address the complex and demanding needs of students of color.

Rita

Rita's experiences resonated with the phrase: Resource Mobilization to Benefit Students, Faculty, and the Community, capturing her focus on developing partnerships that lead to sustainable educational programs, equity in programming, funding, and curriculum design. Rita is a first-generation graduate who has obtained a doctorate. She is an experienced leader with over 30 years of experience in higher education and is currently serving in the role of prov

Rita's experience spans sectarian institutions to Research One Institutions. She ascended the ranks through multiple vice president positions at her current organization. Out of all the institutional types in which she has worked, she explained that community college work is extremely special to her:

> This is the longest I've ever worked at that institution. I just love it and it's true. It's my vocation and my avocation. I think once you start working with traditional community college students, it's hard to go back to a four-year year. That's just my personal opinion because you just, you just have a love for it and for the students in that particular population. It's just different. You know, we're not focused on research here. We're focused really on getting students, recruiting them, retaining them, graduating them, and give them the opportunity to make a decent wage to support their families.

Theme 1: Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships

Rita considers many factors before partnering with an external stakeholder to develop a new program. She explained that the main factor of consideration is "What would our graduates

make coming out of this program…. Our goal is to secure higher attainment and good jobs for our graduates." Sustainability is an institutional value and is high on the list of factors. Rita stated, "We don't want to start a program, and those jobs will be obsolete in the next five years."

Importance of Communication. Rita values communication in partnerships. Potential partners frequently approach the institution, and Rita is frank with them about its desire to engage partners in word and deed for long-term impact. When asked what goes into developing partnerships, Rita shares her questions. She says, "We have to talk to those partners and say, Okay, are you going to assist in funding or faculty…serve on our program advisory boards…can we do this long term…how many students will you contribute." Another aspect of communication Rita finds valuable is communicating changes in needs and staff. She gave these examples:

> What we see is someone will leave that company, and we don't know. We're emailing and calling. So just that communication of basic like, Oh, so you know, I'm leaving this position, but here's the person that's going to be replacing me or you can contact our VP or HR director until we fill this position, So, I would say the first thing is just communication. And that doesn't cost anything, really just basic communication. And also, as their needs change to communicate to the college what that looks like.

Theme 2: Systemic Challenges Facing Higher Education Institutions

[Franklin Technical Community College] takes programmatic cues from Department of Labor data for the service area. The institution is intentional about academic programming and how it benefits the graduates and the community. When asked about challenges within the institution that partnerships have the potential to alleviate, Rita remarks about the extensive time it takes to develop and program and the limited funding available from the state:

> We do that needs assessment…Of course, there's certain approvals through our system and through our accreditation that we have to follow…Do I need faculty? Do I need equipment? Other resources? Most of the time we get money from the state to start a new program, but we have to do projections for enrollment and you know, how many full-time people will we need, how many part-time faculty will we need…We also will gather feedback from our faculty and ask their support and assistance with putting our proposals together…We look at how expensive these programs are…And while we would love for our partners to give us funding or equipment, sometimes that doesn't happen. And so we have to advocate for ourselves and try to raise funding, if you don't have state funding…With our particular accreditation body, any type of new program takes about eight months to improve.

Human Capital. When asked about challenges in maintaining partnerships, Rita speaks on the difficulties of finding and retaining faculty. Rita recounted a specific incident within workforce partnership:

> And we have an alternative high school for students who are at risk…The students can go to their regular high school in the morning, and in the afternoon, they attend this high school which is part of a manufacturing plant. They learn how to do all the soft skills but also they learn how to do widgets. So they are getting work ethics and they're getting the work history so to speak. And so they were doing this with this manufacturing plant, and they came to our institution asking, you know, can they receive academic credit...And I was kind of leery about doing this because I know that it was gonna be a lot of work, and it was. We put together a program based on working with our partners to do a certificate for manufacturing. We taught it one year and we haven't taught it since because the

> faculty member who was teaching that particular course moved to another plant somewhere else…That was very disappointing.

Funding Beyond Financial Aid. Rita is concerned about the funding for new programs, as well as funding for students to complete. Her comments about an ideal partnership were:

> …having partners who really believe in our students and want to see them succeed and go to work for them. That will be critical. Like funding is always critical, and we were welcoming having those fundings because the more funds we get, the more students we can graduate.

Many students at [Franklin Tech] receive financial aid, but it is insufficient. Rita speaks of funds needed for $500 toolkits, childcare needs, emergencies, and other basic needs. The institutions started those kinds of funds through employee giving, but Rita remarked, “They have to go through a lengthy process and that's something we're working on.”

Theme 3: Equity in Programming, Funding, and Curriculum Design

Rita discusses the institution’s deliberate decision to tailor each campus’ educational offerings. The institution adopted a strategic approach to campus development, designating thematic campuses based on industry sectors and community needs where those campuses are located. This allows for targeted program offerings and facilitates student access to specialized education and training opportunities. Rita stated:

> Now, we still teach some of those programs at some of those other sites, but we're trying to get students to understand that when you come to our college, we are one college with many locations…in some areas, we can only offer gen ed. They're very small areas and we support a lot of dual enrollment students and most student enrollment students want general education courses.

Theme 4: The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

When asked about external entities' eagerness to partner with the institution, Rita proudly remarks about the new president as the strongest advocate for the institution. Since he has been there, partners have sought collaboration from the college. The president is relatively new, serving only about three years, in Rita's opinion:

> We were lucky in that we've been very blessed to have a number of federal grants, and we leverage those federal grants to get more federal grants. The president is very engaged in a lot of boards, in a lot of incubation projects, and so it's really built on relationships. I mean, if you think about it, everything is built on relationships.

Rita has consistently demonstrated a deep commitment to collaboration, communication, and strategic planning to create impactful initiatives that benefit students and the community as she supports, develops, and enhances partnerships. She carefully evaluates potential partnerships to ensure that the institution invests wisely in initiatives that directly contribute to student outcomes. Rita leads by example, fostering a culture of communication and mutual support within the institution and with external stakeholders to cultivate meaningful partnerships that drive student success.

Sheila

Sheila's experiences resonated with the phrase: Bridging Education and Industry Through Dynamic Partnerships. It communicates Sheila's role as a catalyst for innovation and progress in education and industry collaboration by building connections that benefit students and the community while addressing real-world challenges. Sheila is a first-generation graduate who has obtained a master's degree. She has risen through the ranks to vice president and has over 12

years of experience in higher education. She has spent her career in higher education working at a predominantly Black institution in The South.

Before working at [Shelly Community College], Sheila worked in hospitality for over 20 years and has been the director of the Convention and Visitor's Bureau. After collaborating with the college to begin a Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management Program, she became interested in working in the educational space. She explained:

> I was like, oh I might like to teach. So whenever I was still in tourism, I went back to school and started working on my MBA so I could teach college level classes. Actually, I started teaching marketing classes for another college...I was teaching marketing classes for another college, and then the position came open here for the hospitality and restaurant and tourism department chair position. I was kind of recruited and brought on board to teach and that's how I ended up here. From there, I've moved up through the ranks.

Theme 1: Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships

Sheila strives to take a proactive approach to partnership development that creates opportunities for student success through workforce development. She has a deep understanding of the complexities of negotiation involved in partnerships. She shared the collaboration that moved their nursing program into an existing hospital. Nursing students also receive free housing on the hospital's upper floors, which was left vacant after COVID-19 subsided. When asked about the development of a partnership at the institution, Sheila reflected:

> They first sent over a proposal for three years, and we're not going to invest all of this and then it will be on the line in three years. Say we're not producing enough graduates or whatever, and you're just going to boot us out. We're spending millions of dollars to

> move our facilities and get all new equipment, state of the art labs, and everything else…It took a lot of negotiating between the parties to get it worked out to where we did move forward…They are funding the building, and they're going to be responsible for the housing aspect… We're leasing the building, providing all the faculty, and all the staff, all the furniture, and fixtures and equipment.

Theme 2: Systemic Challenges Facing Higher Education Institutions

When asked about some challenges in maintaining partnerships, Sheila laments the frequent personnel changes at the institution and the external organization. When people change or positions change, it is not always communicated, creating issues for partnership continuity. Sheila refers to this as "the tribulations of people changing." She continues to say that multiple people and the right people must be at the table.

Low Enrollment. What stays on Sheila's mind lately is how to motivate people to return to school. When asked about institutional challenges that partnerships might be able to fix, she states that the college has not bounced back from the devastation experienced by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to her, the institution is fine finding partners but is struggling to meet the demand for local talent. She responded, "How are we going to increase enrollment with good students who want to complete and go to work? That's the biggest challenge for our college… We've had to work through that."

Attracting Talent to Stay in the Community. The nursing program housing agreement stipulates that students sign a contract to remain in the area and work for a local hospital. Sheila spoke about a Historically Black College in the area that produces a large number of nursing graduates, saying:

> The majority of their people come in from out of town and then they're going back…They go down there to have the four-year college experience, but they're not staying here. So they're producing a lot of nursing graduates, but they're going back home. The majority of our students, because we don't provide housing, they stay here, they go to work here. And with this opportunity, we're hoping that we can bring people in from out of town and other areas to be a part of it.

Theme 3: Equity in Programming, Funding, and Curriculum Design

The nursing students at [Shelly Community College] can take advantage of free housing, earn money, and gain real-world experience as a part of their collaboration with the local hospital. When asked about the partnership of her dreams, she remarked that she would love to see a partnership like that replicated in other programs. She described the local community members as poor and unmotivated. Sheila believes that creating more partnerships like the nursing program will "make it so more students want to come to school and complete and then go to work."

Theme 4: The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

Sheila recalls that starting the nursing program partnership was not easy. The previous president of [Shelly Community College], who passed away during negotiations, was involved with the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Commission, and other such organizations. She explained that most of their partnerships have come locally due to the previous president's relationships and influence. Sheila described the challenges of developing the nursing program partnership after the death of the previous president:

> It pretty much started with our previous president, and it has just made it through from years of pushing…There was a lot of negotiations before he died. And then after he died, we got some things that were way more expensive, more than we could ever possibly afford as a nonprofit institution. And we were like, No, we cannot move forward with this type of price tag on everything…It was something that was in the works for many, many, many, many years, and finally came to fruition.

Sheila's journey in supporting, developing, and enhancing partnerships for student success has been multifaceted. Her background in the hospitality field provided her with insights into the industry's needs and trends. As she transitioned into academia, she leveraged her expertise to lead a significant partnership initiative. She learned from a leader with a grassroots approach to partnership that has helped the institution gain traction within the community. She recognizes the importance of motivating students and responding to workforce needs to revive the community.

Traci

Traci's experiences resonated with the phrase: Forging Connections for Student Success and Community Empowerment due to her work fostering partnerships that support students' educational journey and contribute to the community's overall well-being. Traci has obtained a doctorate and is an experienced institutional advancement professional with over 25 years of experience in higher education. She serves as executive director at a predominantly Black college in The South and has served in this capacity for five years.

When Traci started her career, she never imagined that she would work for a community college. Starting from private institutions and transitioning to public universities, her journey led her to her current role at Colvin Community College. She explained:

> When I was in graduate school actually working on my doctorate, I took a class on community colleges, and really kind of blew it off because I didn't care about that or saw myself in that space ever in my career. It was the Chancellor of [a community college] who taught the class and really that the community colleges were on the frontlines of education and really doing life changing work. And that kind of inspired me, taking that class, just the work and how impactful it was. So then when this job came open, I probably wouldn't have applied if I hadn't taken that course.

Traci was also attracted to the nimbleness, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, and less bureaucratic nature of the community college compared to the universities.

Traci is not originally from the community where she works and has had to adjust to working in a different "culture." She described it as, "an interesting space for me to be in as a white female." Reflecting on her experiences, she shared:

> I think [the city] might be like 60% Black, 40% White. But anyway, all that to be said, that is an interesting difference for me working in a predominantly Black institution, but also being in a predominantly Black city. Because it's just a different culture. The institution itself. So my Chancellor is Black. My CFO is Black. Most of the leadership team except me and the provost…But how you move in the city is a little different, and I'm not part of that community. And so, me learning the community and learning the ins and outs.

However, Traci has developed a passion for the local community. She states, "the education attainment is very low…and the median income is below poverty." Helping the community is the lens she uses to develop philanthropic partnerships. When asked how she makes decisions about partnerships, she replied:

> I usually take the angle of you know, people I'm looking for people who either care about education, care about their community, because as a community college, our impact is greater than just what a four year does…Or it might be that organization cares about crime in [the city], and the work we're doing will reduce crime because people will have jobs and be able to take care of their families and not have to resort to a life of crime. I'm looking for any angle I can, and then if there's no angle then that's not the right partnership for me.

Theme 1: Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships

Continuing her answer about making partnership decisions, Traci remarked that the partners must care about the workforce, education, reducing crime, and the residual effects of providing education and training for the citizens of the community. In Traci's words:

> …A person who cares about some of the things that we need, that we don't offer as a college. Might be food insecurity or it might be to launch an earn while you learn program where we're actually paying people to go to school, not just giving them tuition dollars. And so I think appealing to people that can see the value of a program like that would be people I'm looking to develop partnerships with.

Lifting Up Communities. When asked about an existing partnership for her institution, Traci discussed a partnership with [a big oil company] that operates in one of the poorer neighborhoods in the institution's service area. About the partnership she remarked:

> One partnership that we have that's long withstanding is [big oil company]... It's in a very depressed economic part of [the city]...So they were in the middle of this neighborhood that people couldn't get behind the walls and work there. And so they started this initiative about 12 years ago where they offer free training, and they recruit within the

> neighborhood. They have about 30 or more industrial partners that hire from that group… The industry partners are extremely involved in the curriculum and the training and the certifications that we offer. We're offering free training for their workforce basically, and it's free to the student and free to the company…So we're trying to also help that part of the city and they want to be partners in that work too.

Theme 2: Systemic Challenges Facing Higher Education Institutions

Traci has a lofty goal of "having the community invest back into the community." Many students are unable to stay in school due to financial challenges. She says, "At [Colvin Technical Community College], the number one reason someone drops out is time and money. I mean, that's it; they don't have the time, and they don't have the money, and that's why they don't complete. In times past, she describes a process where the institution would write a proposal in hopes of being funded by the legislature. Traci's ideal partnership includes an "earn while you learn" model. She elaborated:

> It's just purely philanthropic. And we're just giving them a check…A lot of these people already have two jobs, and they're trying to go to night school. So this way you just have to have one job, you can drop the second job and go to school. You know, we're talking $500 or $600. But if they were picking up a few hours of this extra shift to pay that last bill, we're alleviating that stress from them so that they can stay in school. Because the first thing you're gonna drop is school. So we're kind of looking at it from a two pronged approach of letting businesses pay them while they learn…I've seen models out there but I haven't really seen it purely philanthropic.

Community College Stigma. Traci states that until about 25 years ago, the community college system did not exist, and all colleges and universities in her state had an open admissions

policy. Being new in the educational space, a community college education is highly undervalued, and people do not pursue it out of shame. When asked about challenges at the institution, Traci replied:

> Everybody went to four-year if you were going to go on to further education. So it's just kind of an unknown quantity in the way that it's such a part of life in the other states. We're getting there. I mean it just takes a while for people to value that and not be ashamed because your kid has to go to the two year. That's a pretty smart decision because you just saved a ton of money and they can transfer if they want to. So we're just not there yet.

Theme 3: Equity in Programming, Funding and Curriculum Design

Traci speaks proudly about how more students choose [Colvin Technical Community College] over some of the more prominent, well-known, predominantly white universities and the local HBCUs in the area. Traci views this change as a result of the college's focus on what is best for the student rather than self-preservation. She commented:

> For my Chancellor, as a Black male, it is his mission, especially single moms because he was raised by a single mom. Getting them credentialed… If you're going to be a CNA, you need to get your RN. You need to be getting higher credentials so that you can increase your earning potential. And that's a real mission of his. Offering night classes and offering weekend classes and shortening the time to degree and all those creative things so that we could actually make a difference rather than just sticking with the same old four-year model… We're trying to reach the 52% of people that don't go on to higher education at all, like they don't go anywhere.

Theme 4: The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

Traci attributes the success of the college to the Chancellor. She talked about how he has helped her navigate the dynamics of the majority Black city and the competition for businesses that would instead support the local HBCU. She describes him as "very prideful. If we need something, we're going to get it. We're going to pay for it, and we're going to take care of our own, and he wants the best for his students and thinks they deserve the best." She says the Chancellor does not believe in getting things on the cheap or settling for subpar facilities. He believes that community college students deserve the same types of programs or facilities as universities. Therefore, he is proactive in engaging with the community, making it easier for Traci to raise funds. She commented:

> I think a lot of getting people to invest depends on your leader. And so I've had a really positive response. Our Chancellor's really getting out in the community, people know that he's doing some good things…Generally, it's been pretty positive…So that's really good. It's crazy how important it is. I mean, that one person can make a difference in that way.

Traci's experience developing, supporting, and enhancing partnerships revolves around fostering connections for student success and community empowerment through her work in fundraising. She has developed a passion for the local community, focusing on improving education attainment and addressing poverty. Traci seeks organizations that are aligned with values such as caring about education and community well-being. She emphasized the importance of workforce development, crime reduction, and addressing societal challenges through education and training programs.

Cross-Case Analysis and Findings

The findings for the eight participants were based on an analysis of their interviews. This study examined the experiences of eight HBCC and PB administrators' journey of developing, supporting, and enhancing equitable credential and job attainment pathways. The participants served in different locations throughout The South and differed in title, age, gender, background, years of experience, and first-generation status. An analysis of the participants showed that 7 out of the 8 are first-generation college graduates, 7 out of the eight are female, and 3 out of the eight are Black. The researcher examined how these administrators' approach, develop, conduct, and discover partnerships and organized the findings into four themes:

1. Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships
2. Systemic Challenges Facing Higher Education Institutions
3. Equity in Programming, Funding, and Curriculum Design
4. The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

Theme 1: Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships

When considering how the data from these interviews were collectively woven, at least five participants shared experiences related to aligning values when developing partnerships. Brandon emphasized the significance of organizational values and priorities, saying, “So if we see that there's an organization that does not match our values, we're not going to tout ‘here is this organization’ because they don't align with our values.” Kelly based all partnership decisions on value match, saying, “We get requests all the time for people to do things. But if we can't bring it back to the values, it's real easy to get pulled way too many ways.” Nadia shared that her institution is very equity-minded and has to ask if the “partnership focuses on the students who may be the most challenged in retention and completion.” Rita shared about her institution’s

focus on getting students into high wage jobs. So when employer partners reach out, she says, “If it's something that's really minimum wage, we don't pursue that.” For Traci, the focus has to be on developing the workforce of the community, asking, “Do they care about scaling up the skills of the citizens of [the city].”

Significant Investments in Training Facilities and Talent Development. Four participants shared experiences with partnerships to build or upgrade training facilities for students and develop talent in the community. Carlotta’s institution received money from a “foundation that is connected to a company that produces some sort of manufacturing equipment that gave the school a million dollars” for a manufacturing center and healthcare facility. Along with an entire hospital building for healthcare training at Charlotte’s institution, “they also had their foundation raise a million dollars to scholarship the students.” Sheila’s institution also received a full hospital building for “a living and learning community… students will be able to live on this facility, take classes, and work at the hospital right across the street.” Traci institutions has “this training facility…in the middle of this economically depressed neighborhood…where they offer free training and they recruit within the neighborhood…They have about 30 or more industrial partners that hire from that group.”

Focus on Local Engagement. All participants expressed a focus on partnerships within the local community. Partnering with the local community is crucial for colleges because it enables them to impact their communities more significantly and meaningfully. Partnering with the local community allows colleges to extend their reach, leverage resources, and make a tangible difference in students' lives. Participants identified this as one of the main reasons they chose to work in community colleges, saying, "we are our community's college", "that attracted me to the position and the college, to be in a space that was truly making a difference" and "I do

this work because I can change lives and now I can see that I'm changing lives." Working with local stakeholders ensures that college programs and services remain relevant to the community's needs because "institutions that are not driven by that curiosity, that inquisitive eye, and that curiosity and innovation and excellence will close their doors because they are not meeting the needs of the markets that they serve."

Theme 2: Systemic Challenges Facing Higher Education Institutions

When analyzing the collective data from these interviews, six participants highlighted their experiences with the need for more funding to meet students' basic needs. For Brandon, helping to solve student insecurities is "very, very important because, again, where you have those needs, those needs are going to speak louder than those goals that that student has." Charlotte also seeks solutions to students' basic needs, saying:

> Not all the students have cars…For our students in the main County where we're located, the transit system does provide free rides for students who are coming to the campus, but it still takes you an hour to go six miles in some parts of the county. If you're coming to class, four days a week that's eight hours you spent in transit to get there. And it's harder to work a job, and it's harder to deal with childcare...So I think that it's really important for the people who are partnering with us and supporting us to understand that they're just so many challenges that our students themselves are facing that need support to get them through.

Kelly's students "experience food insecurity. We have transportation issues." Since acquiring a partnership that helps support a food pantry, Nadia's institution has "basically had an almost 500% increase in student usage of the pantry." Rita shared that students at her college are struggling "trying to pay child care or just basic needs to make ends meet." Traci shared that

financial aid alone is not enough because “they might have financial aid, and it might all be paid for but they still have to feed their families and pay their bills and have to work.”

Theme 3: Equity in Programming, Funding and Curriculum Design

When reviewing the integrated data from these interviews, two participants shared a desire for new funding for faculty development. Traci would like to see her institution "doing more professorships…allowing them to do course releases and actually apply for grants or do some of that work that's not expected of them.” Brandon thinks about how to keep faculty growing and suggests "making sure that the faculty has an opportunity to still be in the academy, but not have to work every semester in the classroom so that they can stay in tune to where the market is moving.”

Gender Neutrality. Carlotta recognized that healthcare is a majority female interest in her community. When she attempted a partnership to get young men into the healthcare field, she said, "I must have had to visit with them four or five or six times. I don't know how many times…it took them a minute to see the value in it.” Charlotte spoke specifically about men being shamed for gender nonconforming roles, saying we need a system "where we weren't limiting their choices.”

Theme 4: The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

When examining the collective data from these interviews, participants experienced transitions in leadership that led to increased partnership and improvement of institutional relationships. Charlotte attributed much of the institution's partnership success to an engaged president because "my president's predecessor had a very long term of service, and he really wasn't tremendously engaged in the community. And so over the course of his tenure, people disconnected from the institution.” Kelly noted a similar change in community response: "People

are willing to partner now… There's a lot of entrepreneurship development, which is pretty new.” Rita shared that there is so much synergy in partnerships now because "we have a fairly new president of our institution. The president is the one that's advocating, and he's out there trying to raise money.”

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the findings of this study based on the research question. The findings pointed to the evidence of institutional values reflected in external partnerships, the difficulties of systemic challenges facing higher education institutions, the need for equity in programming, funding, and curriculum design, and the importance of engaged leadership in partnership development as aspects central to the experiences of administrators of HBCCs and PBCCs. Also, as a part of their experiences, these leaders view strategic partnerships as critical components of student success and community empowerment. Many leaders reflected on developing and supporting partnerships aligned with institutional values and promoting equity. Facilitating and developing impactful partnerships requires a leader dedicated to fostering collaboration, communication, and strategic planning within their institution and with external stakeholders. These individuals share the goal of leveraging partnerships to support student success, foster community empowerment, and address societal challenges.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This final chapter summarizes the conclusions drawn from participant data. It outlines significant findings, linking them to established scholarly literature and the theoretical frameworks that drove this study. Furthermore, it discusses implications for policy, practice, and recommendations for future research. The chapter will end with a reflection on the researcher's positionality.

Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative study was to expand, through storytelling, the lived experiences of HBCC and PBCC leaders in The South, focusing on their professional contributions to partnership development with external education organizations. The research question that guided this study was:

What are the lived experiences of institutional leaders within historically Black and predominantly Black community colleges who have collaborated with external education partners to support, develop, and enhance equitable pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes?

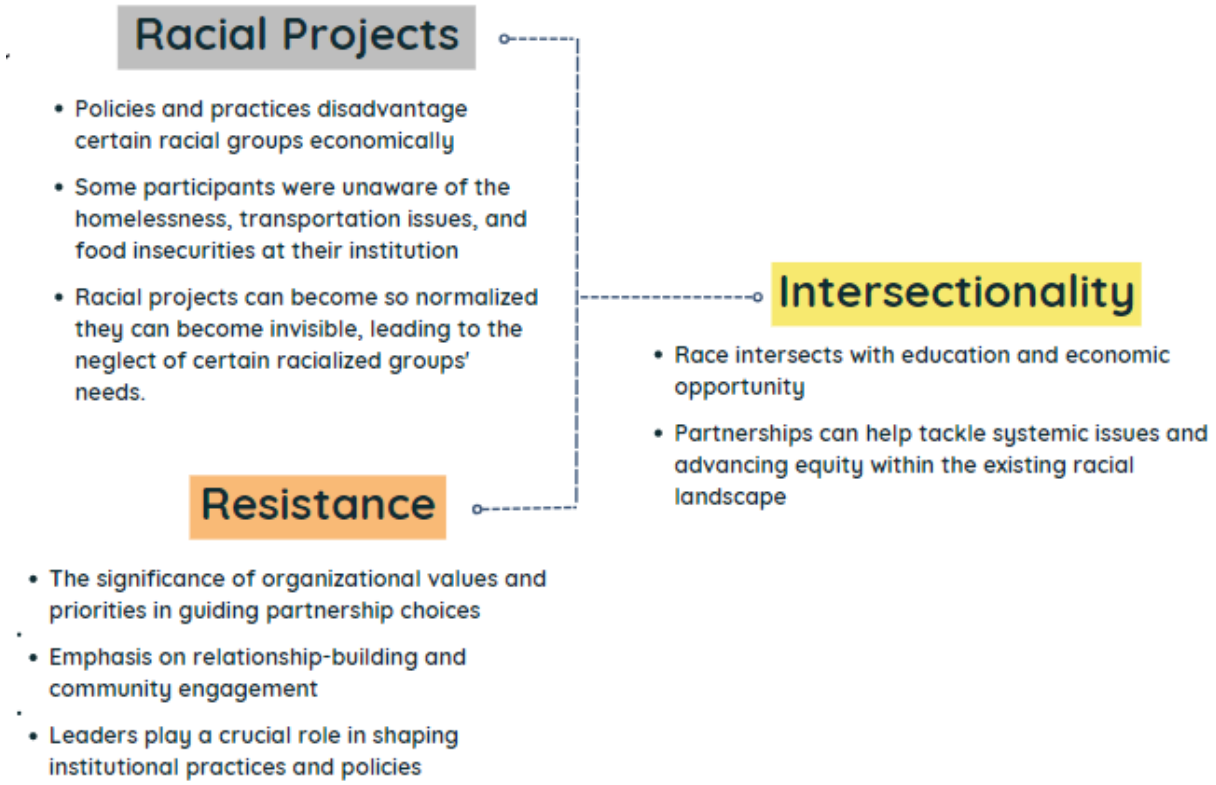
Summary of Key Findings

The qualitative data obtained from participants assisted in pinpointing key findings and establishing links to the overarching theoretical framework proposed by Omi and Winant (2015), along with supporting conceptual frameworks proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966). Although this study focused solely on HBCCs and PBCCs in The South, the findings resonate with existing literature that describes partnerships as an essential part of upholding the community college mission.

Racial Formation Theory (RFT) Applied

The interview protocol (Appendix E) for this study was specifically designed to elicit responses from participants about HBCCs and PBCCs without leading into the discussion of racial issues. However, participants' responses reflected key points of Omi and Winant's (2015) Racial Formation Theory (RFT). A graphic representation was created to provide a visual representation of the application of RFT. Figure 6.1 provides the visual context of RFT in participants' responses.

Figure 6.1 *Omi and Winant's (2015) Racial Formation Theory in Participant Responses*



Agency and Resistance. In RFT, race is described as a malleable structure rather than a fixed, inherent attribute of individuals or groups (Omi & Winant, 2015). This perspective emphasizes the agency of individuals and groups in challenging racial identities through activism and everyday practices. The participants' experiences shared through this research study

highlighted the significance of organizational values and priorities in guiding partnership choices, including choosing not to partner with entities that do not prioritize community impact. The participants' emphasis on relationship-building and community engagement reflected efforts to address racialized educational disparities and support marginalized communities. They shared concerns about knowing students may be unable to afford education, so "how do we provide them with a wonderful opportunity…and not just dangle something in front of them that was not accessible." The participants often highlighted the role of institutional leaders in driving partnership development and fostering community connections, further demonstrating that leaders play a crucial role in shaping institutional practices and policies that either perpetuate or challenge power dynamics and racial hierarchies.

RFT posits that dominant groups have the power to define and maintain racial hierarchies, while marginalized groups may resist or challenge these structures through collective action (Omi & Winant, 2015). Participants mentioned misconceptions, undervaluation, and stigma associated with community colleges, reflecting how racial meanings can be attached to educational institutions. A racialized hierarchy exists in educational institutions, where four-year universities are often associated with success, upward mobility, and predominantly white student populations. Conversely, community colleges are sometimes perceived as institutions for those who are unable to succeed in traditional academia, with racially diverse student bodies. Participants shared, "I won't say they turn their nose up at us, but some of them have said, 'our students don't go to your school'" and "if you go to technical college, you are either considered to be too poor, or too dumb, or too poorly connected, something is not enough about you." This study highlights how racialized perceptions shape societal attitudes toward different educational

paths, ultimately reinforcing patterns of racial inequality and stratification within the education system and beyond.

Intersectionality. RFT recognizes that race intersects with other social categories, such as gender, class, and sexuality, to shape individuals' experiences and opportunities (Omi & Winant, 2015). Intersectionality highlighted the complex duality of identity and inequity. Participants' responses contributed to a deeper understanding of the intersections of race, education, and economic opportunity, touching upon systemic challenges, disparities in access and support, and the impact of policies on marginalized communities. Participants shared, "There is right now an all out assault on organizations that promote diversity. There's an all out assault on equitable outcomes and opportunities for all" and "there's still things that we're limited in what we're able to do by state law or state policy." The focus on workforce development, education, and community uplift in these partnerships signifies a dedication to tackling systemic issues and advancing equity within the existing racial landscape.

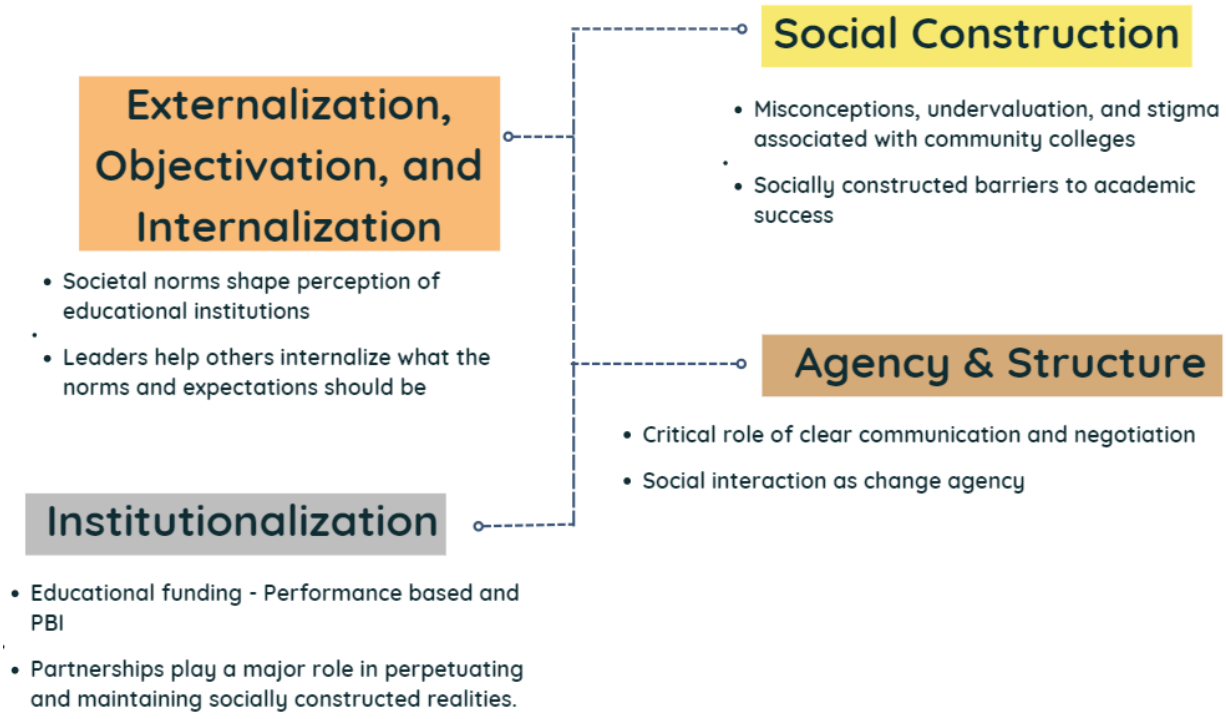
Racial Projects. RFT describes racial projects as representations of race in language thought, imagery, popular discourse, and interaction that assign meaning to race (Omi & Winant, 2015). Institutions, organizations, and individuals actively participate in racial projects through policies, practices, and cultural representations. Some participants mentioned their unawareness of the magnitude of student struggles, such as homelessness, transportation issues, and food insecurities, stating,"I think most of us are unaware of all the things that people struggle with" or "years ago, we had a young man, and we got him a bicycle..it's amazing, sometimes how little it takes to save them." Discussions about financial barriers, the need for scholarships, and funding shortages reflected how policies and practices that disadvantage certain racial groups economically contribute to the reproduction of racial hierarchies. Ultimately, the experiences

shared through meaningful interviews demonstrated that racial projects can become so normalized that they are rendered invisible within institutions, leading to the neglect of certain racialized groups' needs.

Connections to Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was built upon Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality Theory (SCRT) (1966). The interview protocol for this study incorporated questions related to the conceptual framework. Overall, these discussions illustrate critical points from Berger and Luckmann's theory in how individuals within institutions actively engage in the social construction of reality through their interactions, decisions, and partnerships with external stakeholders. A graphic representation was created to visually represent the SCRT application. Figure 7.1 provides the visual context of SCRT in participants' responses.

Figure 7.1 *Berger and Luckmann's (1966) Social Construction of Reality Theory in Participant Responses*



Reality as Socially Constructed. In SRCT, reality is not fixed. It is socially constructed through ongoing processes of interaction and negotiation among individuals within a society (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Participants' face resistance in advocating for diversity initiatives reflects the social construction of norms and attitudes towards diversity, equity, and inclusivity. Explicitly referring to approved and pending anti-DEI legislation across the country, participants share that "there's some other institutions that are following suit, and the decisions that are made that are politically driven, have nothing to do with student success" and "I don't feel like I can be very open about these issues because I'm talking to people who will be offended, and we will lose money if I raise these issues too much."

Participants emphasized the need to address students' well-being because "the immediate need is speaking louder and is pressing in harder than the goals." One participant shared the frustration with explaining to the board of trustees that "you need to realize that being $50 short on your tuition payment doesn't seem like a lot, but we don't have food to feed your family next week, $50 is everything." Another shared, "There are some students who nobody they know works; they've never seen anybody go to work. They don't have a role model for that." Socially constructed barriers to academic success, such as access to resources, social expectations, discrimination, and lack of support systems, keep students in a cycle of facing financial insecurities, childcare needs, transportation issues, and food insecurities.

Participants' discussions around gender roles and stereotypes in different fields highlight how societal norms shape career choices. Participants shared concerns about men facing stigma for gender-nonconforming roles.

Additionally, the participants spoke about constructed realities within educational institutions highlighting how societal norms shape perception of educational institutions

opportunities. One participant shared, "I also just think that people in [the state] don't value the two-year as much as the four-year," while another thought, "If you look at the two-year college, we got to rebrand. No longer is it acceptable that we're the best kept secret." Community colleges can be taken for granted based on certain beliefs and practices that have become ingrained within society.

Externalization, Objectivation, and Internalization. SCRT posits the concept of the "social construction of reality" through three processes: externalization (individuals' actions shape the world), objectivation (the world takes on a reality independent of individuals), and internalization (individuals learn and internalize the socially constructed reality) (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Participants shared ideas and values around leadership influence, community engagement, and reputation management, demonstrating the internalization process, where individuals internalize societal norms, values, and expectations within institutional partnerships. Participants recognize the importance of leadership engagement in shaping community perceptions, saying, "We have this community synergy right now, and because we have this visionary president who has built connections…Everyone that we speak with is excited to hear what we're talking about as we're as excited to share it." Leaders help others internalize what the norms and expectations should be as well. One participant reflected that the growing interest in partnerships is "because of his energy and leadership, there's a buzz right now that's happening."

Institutionalization. Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasize the role of institutions in perpetuating and maintaining socially constructed realities. Institutions such as family, education, religion, and government play a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions and interpretations of reality.

Educational funding is one such institution that often presents challenges. One participant discussed, "We need more funding to help because the needs of our students are greater than the funding that comes in…we have too many colleges and universities in the marketplace." Participants spoke about the need to continue facilitating partnerships and fundraising because "funding is always critical." Performance-based funding is a social construction that further marginalizes institutions that serve predominantly black students. Performance-based funding does not consider the community college's need to support outside the classroom and does not adequately measure how community colleges serve their students. Therefore, funding does not keep up with institutional or student needs (St. Amour, 2020). Even federal grants for PBIs render funding inconsistent from year to year since it is mainly based on the enrollment of black students.

Participants' partnerships play a significant role in perpetuating and maintaining socially constructed realities. Partnerships in which industry partners contribute funding and state-of-the-art facilities and equipment enhance the institution's reputation. Educational institutions shape and prioritize their values, such as student success, integrity, and accountability, which influence their actions and decisions. Instead of community college being an institution at which some would look down their nose, they begin to see, "Oh, these are the kinds of jobs that don't get outsourced. Everybody needs a nurse or dental hygienist or a plumber or an electrician, or a welder at some point. And there are ways to not have all this debt."

Agency and Structure. While emphasizing the social construction of reality, Berger and Luckmann also acknowledge the role of individual agency in shaping and negotiating reality within the constraints of social structures and institutions.

In discussions about partnership development, participants consistently emphasized the critical role of clear communication and negotiation, illustrating how individuals actively shape their social realities through interactions with external stakeholders. The transformative power of partnerships emphasizes how institutions influence the social fabric of the communities they serve, particularly in addressing socioeconomic disparities. Community impact is a top priority "because the education attainment is very low, the median income is below poverty… I'm working to make sure we get all the partners in there, making sure that they are thinking about us in their philanthropic plans."

Within educational institutions, shared values significantly impact the construction of reality. Participants collectively construct meanings around partnership development, community engagement, and institutional leadership, highlighting the centrality of partnerships in education and the role of leaders in shaping institutional practices. The discussions further illuminate the role of social interactions in reality construction within educational settings as participants describe the impact their leaders are having through relationship-building and community engagement. Everyday interactions have a significant influence on partnership strategies and institutional goals. Participants feel that "once you get somebody on board, who people respect and who is influential, other people start to fall in line…I tease my president that I need to know who he sees at lunch every day."

Overall, Berger and Luckmann's theory provides a framework for understanding how social realities are constructed, maintained, and transformed through social interactions, institutions, and individual experiences. The emphasis on data analysis, strategic planning, and mutual benefit in partnership development creates conditions for what was once a matter of individual interpretation or perspective to become embedded within an institution's structures,

policies, and practices. These subjective meanings then shape how the institution operates, guiding decision-making processes, defining norms and values, and influencing stakeholder interactions.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This dissertation study produced findings that support several implications for policy and practice. Participants shared their experiences, contributing to the meaning-making to identify key ideas that can transform traditional approaches to developing, supporting, and enhancing partnerships for student success.

Theme 1: Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships

Alongside focusing on collaborative efforts that align with institutional goals and values, evaluate new and existing partnerships based on their potential to collectively enhance student success and workforce readiness.

Higher education institutions must partner with external organizations, such as businesses, community groups, or government agencies, to achieve common goals and address shared challenges. These collaborations involve working together towards mutually beneficial outcomes. The industry needs a skilled workforce, but the potential workforce may struggle to make ends meet long enough to stay in training. "You're taking somebody from a [fast food job] to a [corporate entity], making $80,000 and really changing communities." However, it takes more support for students to get there. State-of-the-art facilities and equipment are crucial to developing a talented workforce, but they only pay the bills or feed the children much later. Instead of finding a partner for a food pantry, another partner for gas cards, and another partner to donate equipment, community college leaders should refine their students' stories to the point that when large corporations or wealthy donors engage, they can make requests for

comprehensive support to help students have their needs met to attain credentials promptly and be ready to enter the workforce.

Consider opportunities for institutional partnerships with local HBCUs and other predominantly Black institutions.

At least two participants shared that there is an HBCU within their institution's service area, some as close as three miles away. Both shared feelings that there is some competition for Black students in the area but that the community colleges' enrollment had surpassed that of the HBCUs. One participant described the local HBCU as "on life support." Another participant shared, "They're about protecting themselves and what they have. We are driving our decision-making based on what's best for the students, and so they're gonna get left behind." As opposed to the local HBCUs, community colleges are offering night and weekend classes and making attempts to shorten the time needed to get a degree. The current four-year model at the HBCU is more like "Oh, you can't make it a class on Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 8 am? Well, that's too bad because that's your only option.

Instead of further contributing to the atmosphere of competition, PBCCs, and HBCUs should explore partnerships such as 2+2 agreements, co-enrollments, dormitory access, shared cafeteria access, shared faculty, and other resources. Identifying the structural factors and sources that perpetuate racial outcome gaps and making changes to the systems to eliminate those inequities is a vital facet of the Racial Equity Theory of Change. The institutionalized two-year and four-year college models need to undergo reevaluation for their role in perpetuating inequities. One participant specifically called out that many institutions recognize the need for collaboration between institutions but was skeptical that institutions are ready to comply, saying, "No one wants to say 'I'll merge my institution with yours'...Because of this self-centered way.

Oh, no. We need to merge them but it won't be mine." Collaborations between institutions have the potential to close food, transportation, financial, and childcare gaps and help those students move along the process faster.

Create partnership-focused advisory boards.

Creating partnership-focused advisory boards can be highly beneficial for colleges for several reasons. Advisory boards can serve as champions for the college, advocating for its interests and priorities within the community. Secondly, partnership-focused advisory boards can help colleges forge stronger connections with key stakeholders in the community. Advisory board members can also help colleges navigate complex issues and partnerships, offering advice and support based on their expertise and experience. The board should consist of representatives from industry, government, nonprofit organizations, and other relevant sectors to bring insights into current challenges and opportunities facing the community and the workforce. Leveraging this board's expertise and connections could lead to more opportunities for job placements, funding, and other support for students and programs.

Theme 2: Systemic Challenges Facing Higher Education Institutions

Be proactive in making institutional changes in the face of anti-DEI legislation and potentially biased partners.

Institutions should review their existing policies and procedures to ensure compliance with anti-DEI legislation while upholding their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This may involve revising language, modifying practices, or implementing alternative approaches to promote diversity and combat discrimination. Recently, the University of Florida decided to close all DEI offices, eliminate all staff, and end all contracts and initiatives related to DEI by April 19, 2024 (Anderson, 2024). Nearly 30 people will lose their jobs, and all student

employees who benefitted from their services will no longer. State-funded HBCCs and PBCCs should begin renaming offices and titles, producing inclusive programming and support, and navigating the new anti-DEI landscape to combat threats to college funding, students, and employees.

Develop partnerships that support diversity, equity, and inclusion despite political pressures.

This study offers valuable insights into the challenges and systemic barriers students struggle with while attempting to have a better life. "The goal is to complete a program. What's the reason for that? To be gainfully employed or to start their own business. At the end of the day it is all about a better life." Community colleges should develop strategic, transformative partnerships until the act of multiple entities working together for community impact is a reality and the college is fiscally sound enough to operate regardless of state laws. External partners and institutions alike should approach partnerships with the knowledge of challenges related to human capital.

"Many times the partnerships that provide money, they want to create a boutique program for a certain population," but the institution struggles with staffing challenges to uphold the current operations. It is no secret that college staff members wear multiple hats. One participant manages a department of only six employees responsible for all student services and student engagement activities. Another participant manages 26 partner relationships, describing it as "26 best friends, and they all want your attention. I could never get any work done if I gave them all equal attention." Partnerships take time and effort to nurture into efficacy. It is not just about signing agreements or exchanging resources. There has to be bandwidth to keep the focus on

consistent communication, active engagement, and a commitment to shared goals and values to create meaningful, sustainable partnerships for students.

Consider how interest convergence may enable partnerships to help address systemic issues through the alignment of interests and addressing power imbalances.

Derrick Bell (1980) proposed the Interest Convergence Theory, which indicates that racial advancements in the United States often happen when they align with the interests of the dominant group. Regarding institutional collaborations, addressing racial inequalities may encounter opposition unless there are benefits for the dominant group. Recognizing this dynamic is crucial for overcoming structural obstacles and fostering authentic partnership cooperation and fairness. Although interest convergence theory offers a critical viewpoint, it also presents chances to utilize partnerships to promote racial advancements. By harmonizing the interests of various stakeholders, institutional collaborations can drive progress and work toward mutual objectives concerning diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Theme 3: Equity in Programming, Funding, and Curriculum Design

Continue to work on reducing the time to completion and creating on/off ramps for training.

At least three participants shared their desire to reduce the time to degree completion for students. While not a new revelation, it can be an extremely effective intervention for students. The most frequent barrier to completion shared by the participants was childcare: "they need childcare, and there's no childcare. That's why on our campus, we have a Headstart program, "employers spoke about not bringing the baby to the interview," and "when industry people say, nobody wants to work, I'm like you can't go to work if you don't have childcare." The affordability of childcare and the trustworthiness of childcare providers need to be taken into

consideration when planning program modalities because "Maybe they have a child or two and they're working a part-time job or two" and "they don't have two years to stop out of their earning potential to get a credential that may go from $12 an hour to $20 an hour."

Shortening the time it takes for students to complete their training or education increases the likelihood of students who may face financial or time constraints to be successful. Traditional programming is set up to be more friendly to students just graduating high school, with no responsibilities and a high level of familial support. For students who do not have a straight path to college, navigating the current setup is more than challenging. By offering opportunities for students to enter and exit training programs at different points, colleges can accommodate those needing to balance their education with work, family responsibilities, or other commitments..

Provide faculty with opportunities for professional growth and exposure to emerging industries.

Community colleges can help learners progress toward traditional degrees and careers by using specialized microcredentials that show a mastery of one or more competencies to build higher education programs connected to the workplace (McCarthy, 2015). Usually, community college workforce development majors are usually guided by an advisory board that gives input on credentials and training necessary to succeed in local industry. Participants shared thoughts about how faculty workloads could be adjusted to incorporate industry work experience with their teaching loads, saying, "that means that there may be a semester or two that faculty members, still employed, won't be able to teach. In order for them to stay abreast to market needs, they've got to stay immersed in that space." In light of faculty workload policy revisions, the idea of providing faculty with opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways to the industries in which they serve as experts, they will continue to have recent real-world experience

in the field, can do a better job of training students, and reassure workforce partners that students are highly skilled.

Utilize climate surveys for faculty and staff.

At least three participants had served in their role for over ten years, potentially before the institution received the designation of PBI. The community around the institution may have changed, but institutional staffing has stayed the same. Through climate surveys, institutions can gauge how well the college community embraces partnerships geared towards DEI and other related initiatives. This information can inform efforts around addressing issues, ideologies, and challenges that contribute to systemic barriers. Colleges can also use the insights to inform strategic decision-making when it comes to retention and promotion of faculty and staff who want to maximize equitable community impact, professional development opportunities, and race-related weaknesses in the institutional climate.

Theme 4: The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development

Stay current on professional development in community engagement and relationship building.

Communities are dynamic, with changing demographics, needs, and priorities. Community college leaders must stay current on professional development to understand these changes and adapt their engagement strategies accordingly. Keeping abreast of best practices and emerging trends in community engagement allows leaders to develop more effective partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and government agencies. Community engagement and relationship building are critical to enhancing student success. Community engagement allows leaders to identify resources that can positively impact student outcomes. Building strong

relationships with community stakeholders can also enhance the institution's reputation and visibility in the community.

A practical example can be professional development around the ethic of care that emphasizes the empowerment of students by providing them with the support, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed academically and personally. This approach encourages educators to build meaningful relationships with students, recognize their strengths and potential, and actively involve them in decision-making processes that affect their educational journey (Keeling, 2014). It is crucial to establish a practical agreement to ensure that leaders are attentive to the needs of Black students.

Provide cultural sensitivity training and cultural bias professional development.

At least two participants expressed insensitive comments concerning students. When asked a prompting question about challenges that students were facing, one participant stated, "I think there's a lot of lack of motivation…A lot of people don't want to go to school, and they don't want to go to work…and stay off drugs." In response to a similar question, another participant shared, "We had a young man, and we got him a bicycle. And it just changed everything. Now I see him on LinkedIn, he works for a very large global company in another part of the state, incredibly successful," thinking that this was the intervention that changed everything for him when he lived almost 50 miles away from the campus. By the end of these interviews, neither participant mentioned Black students. Their responses placed blame on potential students who were experiencing challenges with motivation due to the barriers of drugs, unemployment, or transportation. Rather than placing blame, these high-ranking college executives could have seen an opportunity to consider avenues for outreach, support, and

increased communication to fill the gap of the lack of support these potential students may be receiving from friends and family.

Cultural bias training is crucial in education to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion within educational settings. By increasing understanding of cultural biases and nurturing cultural competence among educators and administrators, these training initiatives help establish inclusive, supportive, and successful learning environments for all students..

Recommendations for Future Research

Since there is little scholarly research available related to HBCCs and PBCCs, there are many opportunities to expand future research, but based on the particular implications of this study, there are three significant recommendations.

Recommendation for Future Research 1: Because participants collectively shared the importance of partnering with external entities that shared their values, future research could incorporate a qualitative narrative inquiry focusing on the partners identified as strong collaborators with HBCCs or PBCCs. This research can lead to increased success and impact in achieving mutual goals. Each partner brings distinct perspectives, expertise, and priorities to the collaboration, emphasizing the importance of understanding their viewpoints. Actively engaging partners allows organizations to uncover opportunities, tackle obstacles, and optimize resource utilization. Moreover, listening to partners fosters transparency, accountability, and mutual respect, establishing a solid foundation for enduring relationships. Getting the partners' voices heard about institutional partnerships is essential for fostering effective collaboration, maximizing the benefits of the partnership, and building solid and sustainable relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

Recommendation for Future Research 2: Since students are the targeted recipients of the benefits of strategic partnerships, it is essential to conduct further research on student experiences and outcomes related to partnerships at HBCCs and PBCCs. As educational institutions with majority Black populations, there is a need for perspectives to prioritize the intersectionality of students, and the institution's mission and overall atmosphere align with supporting them. Additionally, as PBIs are a new designation, obtaining Black students' voices about institutional partnerships is essential for ensuring that these collaborations are inclusive, relevant, and impactful. By seeking Black students' voices in research, partnerships benefit from their firsthand experiences and insights into their communities' specific needs and challenges. These insights can help to shape the direction and outcomes of collaborations. Additionally, Black students' perspectives contribute to the assessment of partnership impact, providing valuable feedback on effectiveness and areas for improvement, ultimately leading to more impactful collaborations.

Recommendation for Future Research 3: Also, any studies previously conducted on community colleges at large could be replicated for HBCCs and PBCCs. Replicating research on student success at Black colleges is crucial for advancing knowledge, fostering equity, and empowering communities within Black institutions of higher education. By concentrating on the experiences and accomplishments of underrepresented minority students, this research enhances our comprehension of diversity and equity in higher education.

Black colleges are critical in granting Black students access to higher education, addressing systemic hurdles and disparities in traditional higher education settings. Student success can be affected by various contextual elements, such as the student body's demographic makeup, institutional resources, and cultural norms (Arroyo and Gasman, 2014). Replicating research in

this setting helps bridge gaps in understanding the experiences and achievements of students at Black colleges. It ensures that the needs and obstacles encountered by students at these institutions are appropriately recognized, promoting equity and inclusion. Research outcomes from studies conducted at Black colleges can guide the formulation of policies and practices to enhance student success and institutional efficacy. Replicating research in this context offers policymakers, administrators, and practitioners valuable insights into successful strategies for supporting the diverse needs of students at Black colleges.

Recommendation for Future Research 4: Acknowledging the historical context, an ethic of care emphasizes the well-being and success of students in these communities. This approach cultivates an inclusive and supportive learning environment that respects students' cultural identity and heritage by recognizing and valuing diversity. Educators and administrators should analyze and address structural barriers, advocating for equitable policies and practices that uphold social justice within the institution.. Extending beyond the classroom, an ethic of care also influences the college's interaction with the local community by fostering partnerships, outreach programs, and collaborative initiatives to benefit students and residents (Keeling, 2014). Emotional harm can impact students if there is a lack of leaders, staff, or faculty who genuinely understand and support them. Research has shown that supportive, caring relationships between educators and students can significantly impact student success and retention rates. An ethic of care fosters these relationships by prioritizing empathy, trust, and understanding, ultimately contributing to improved academic outcomes and holistic development among students (Persky, 2021). Research around how Black community colleges are fostering an ethic of care is crucial for establishing a supportive, empowering, and inclusive educational setting that values the humanity and dignity of every individual.

Positionality Statement

The researcher is a female, Black, mid-level leader working in a large Texas community college system who has had all ten years of her community college experience in the South, both rural and urban. As a doctoral candidate enrolled in a community college leadership program, the researcher is interested in leadership and aims to achieve higher administrative positions within the community college system. Assumptions of the researcher, based on personal experience, are that Black students face unique challenges and barriers to success in community colleges, community colleges play a crucial role in facilitating access to higher education for Black students, and tailored support services and programs are necessary to address the specific needs and experiences of Black students in community colleges. Another assumption is that leaders of Black colleges are majority Black, possess a deep understanding of Black students' unique needs and experiences, and are proactive in addressing systemic barriers to educational attainment. Finally, the researcher assumes that community college leaders will desire to participate and engage in honest discussions around partnership decisions and institutional challenges.

One bias is that as a Black student from The South who attended college in The South and encountered more than a few challenges while attempting to earn an education, the researcher expected to hear the stories of Black students' struggles. As a Black American and a practitioner in a state that has passed anti-DEI legislation, the researcher expected to hear that little is being done to support Black students by local and state entities. Attempts to eliminate bias included avoiding leading questions, maintaining a neutral tone and body language, having peer debriefing sessions and member checking (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Bracketing also helped to further de-identify participants and data.

Reflection Statement

As a Black female educator from The South anticipating advancing into senior-level leadership roles, conducting these interviews generated more sadness than I have felt before. While interview data produced some findings we already knew, it also solidified the burden of knowing that so much more needs to be done. The weight of listening to some of the statements made throughout data collection while maintaining the efficacy expected of a high level qualitative researcher became difficult. To know that there are still executive leaders of predominantly Black community colleges in The South, even with all the evidence available regarding the challenges of Black students, who refuse to acknowledge those students or even try to fake it, hurt me more than I realized. Tears were shed more than once.

I have spent my entire life in The South, and the notable differences between the "haves and the have nots" in regards to education, opportunities, family support, apathy for economic and social progress in my community, and even in my own family, sometimes become so familiar that I don't even see them. This study caused me to readjust my focus. While I am not sure if my future lies in community college administration, I am entirely sure my work will reflect my renewed purpose of helping marginalized people realize transformation through advocacy and education.

Conclusion

This study on community college partnerships within HBCCs and PBCCs emphasized the critical importance of aligning values, prioritizing student needs, and fostering strong leadership and community engagement. It highlights the significance of shared values between institutions and external entities in driving successful partnerships, emphasizing the need for mutual collaboration and benefit. Understanding the diverse experiences and intersectionality of

students emerges as a central theme, reinforcing the ultimate goal of placing student perspectives at the forefront of partnership initiatives. Moreover, the study stressed the pivotal role of visionary leadership in partnership development, emphasizing the impact of engaged leaders who actively cultivate relationships within the community and champion collaboration.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the value of data-informed decision-making and continuous learning in partnership endeavors. It revealed the need for partnerships to evolve, adapting to changing circumstances and remaining responsive to the evolving needs of students and the community. By addressing gaps in research and fostering a deeper understanding of partnership dynamics, this study provides valuable insights that can inform future partnership initiatives and enhance student success in Historically Black and predominantly Black community colleges.

References

Achieving the Dream. (2022). *Strategic partnerships for holistic student supports toolkit.* https://achievingthedream.org/strategic-partnerships-for-holistic-student-supports-toolkit/

Achieving the Dream. (2023). *Knowing our students: Understanding & designing for success. A guidebook for institutional leaders.* https://achievingthedream.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ATD_Knowing_Our_Students_2023.pdf

Adelman, Clifford. (2005). *Moving into town — and moving on: The community college in the lives of traditional-age students*. U.S. Department of Education. https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/comcollege/index.html#:~:text=Two%20years%20after%20high%20school,bachelor's%20level%20(table%2041)

Alexander, M. (2020, June 8). *America, this is your chance: We must get it right this time or risk losing our democracy forever*. New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/08/opinion/george-floyd-protests-race.html

Allen, B. C. M. & Esters, L. T. (2018). *Historically Black land-grant universities: Overcoming barriers and achieving success.* Center for Minority Serving Institutions. https://cmsi.gse.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/HBLGUs_0.pdf

American Association of Community Colleges. (2022). *The economic value of America's community colleges.* https://aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AACC_MainReport_1920_Formatted-Finalv2.pdf

American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) (2018). *Making partnerships work: Principles, guidelines, and advice for public university leaders*. https://aascu.org/resources/making-partnerships-work-principles-guidelines-and-advice-for-public-university-leaders/

Amey, M.J. (2010), Leading partnerships: Competencies for collaboration. N*ew Directions for Community Colleges,149,* 13-23. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1002/cc.391

Amey, M. J., Eddy, P. L., & Campbell, T. G. (2010). Crossing boundaries creating community college partnerships to promote educational transitions. Community College Review, 37(4), 333-347. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552110365725

Anderson, C. (2024). *U of F axes diversity and inclusion office under GOP-led law aimed at ridding similar programs.* The Associated Press. https://apnews.com/article/dei-eliminated-university-florida-desantis-gainesville-education-804ff56bfeaa9787a91860e8470ae664

Arroyo, A. T. & Gasman, M. (2014). An HBCU-based approach for Black college student success: Toward a framework with implication for all institutions. *American Journal of Education*, *121*(1), 57-85. https://doi.org/10.1086/678112

Aspen Institute. (n.d.) *Leading highly effective external strategic partnerships.* https://collegeexcellencecurriculum.aspeninstitute.org/module/leading-highly-effective-external-strategic-partnerships/

Association for Career and Technical Education. (2019). *A brief history of CTE*. https://www.acteonline.org/why-cte/what-is-cte/acte-history/

Association for Career & Technical Education. (2022). *What is CTE?*. https://www.acteonline.org/why-cte/what-is-cte/

ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH. (2023). ATLAS.ti Mac (version 23.2.1) [Qualitative data analysis software]. https://ATLASti.com

Avery College Historical Marker. (2011). Explore PA History. http://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-37E

Bahrm P. R. (2019). The labor market returns to community college education for noncompleting students. *The Journal of Higher Education, 90*(2), 210-243. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1080/00221546.2018.1486656

Bailey, H. (2020). *Body cam transcripts give fuller picture of Floyd's fear. Officer told Floyd his pleas for breath were wasting it*. Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/george-floyd-death-transcripts/2020/07/08/a7050efe-c15c-11ea-b178-bb7b05b94af1_story.html

Bailey, T., Calcagno, J. C., Jenkins, D., Leinbach, T., & Kienzl, G. (2006). Is student-right-to-know all you should know? An analysis of community college graduation rates. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(5), 491–519. doi:10.1007/s11162-005-9005–0

Barriball, K. L., & While, A.(1994). Collecting data using a in-depth interview: A discussion paper. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 19,* 328-335. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01088.x

Barton, P. E., & Coley, R. J. (2010). *The Black-White achievement gap: When progress stopped.* Educational Testing Service. https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICBWGAP.pdf

Baugus, K. E. (2020) Food insecurity, inadequate childcare, & transportation disadvantage: Student retention and persistence of community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 44*(8), 608-622. DOI: 10.1080/10668926.2019.1627956

Belfield, C. R., & Bailey, T. (2017). The labor market returns to sub-baccalaureate college: A review (CAPSEE Working Paper). Columbia University, Teachers College, Center for

Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment. https://capseecenter.org/labor-market-returns-sub-baccalaureate-college-review/

Bell, D. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review 93*(3), 515-533. https://doi.org/10.2307/1340546

Bensimon, E. M. (2018) Reclaiming racial justice in equity. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 50,*(3-4), 95-98, DOI: 10.1080/00091383.2018.1509623

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* Random House.

Berrey, E. C. (2011). Why diversity became orthodox in higher education, and how it changed the meaning of race on campus. *Critical Sociology*, *37*(5), 573-596. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920510380069

Birks, Melanie & Chapman, Ysanne & Francis, Karen. (2008). Memoing in qualitative research: Probing data and processes. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 13*. 68-75. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987107081254

Bonilla-Silva E. (2018). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bonner, F. A., II. (2004). *Black professors: On the track but out of the loop*. Chronicle of Higher Education. https://www.chronicle.com/article/Black-professors-on-the-track-but-out-of-the-loop/

Boswell, K., & Wilson, C. D. (2004). Keeping America's promise: A report on the future of the Community College. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED485663.pdf

Brooms, D. R. (2019). Helping us think about ourselves: Black males' sense of belonging through connections and relationships with faculty in college. *International Journal of Qualitatative Studies in Education, 33*(9), 921-938. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1080/09518398.2019.1687956

Broton, K. M., & Goldrick-Rab, S. (2017). *Going without: An exploration of food and housing insecurity among undergraduates. Educational Researcher, 47*(2), 121–133. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17741303

Brown, Z., Williams, J. & Esters, L. (2021). *Presidents and their strategies to build partnerships at HBCUs*. Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Leadership, Equity, & Justice. https://proctor.gse.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/MSIreportFeb21_R4.pdf

Bruce, A., Beuthin, R., Sheilds, L., Molzahn, A., & Schick-Makaroff, K. (2016). Narrative research evolving: Evolving through narrative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 15*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406916659292

Carnevale, A. P., & Strohl, J. (2013). *Separate and unequal: How higher education reinforces the intergenerational reproduction of White racial privilege*. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/separateunequal/

Carter, L. S. & Duggan, M. H. (2010). Philanthropic motivations of community college donors. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 35*(1-2), 61-73. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1080/10668926.2011.525178

Ceron, E. & Rupp, L. (2023). *Hiring for diversity officials stalls after 2 years of big promises.* Bloomberg. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-02/chief-diversity-officer-roles-stall-why-are-dei-efforts-failing#xj4y7vzkg

Chen, Y. , & Starobin, S. S. (2019). Formation of social capital for community college students: A second-order confirmatory factor analysis. *Community College Review, 47*(1), 3-30. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552118815758

Clotfeleter, C. T., Ladd, H. F., & Vigdor, J. L. (2015). *Public universities, equal opportunity, and the legacy of Jim Crow: Evidence from North Carolina.* National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w21577/w21577.pdf

Cohen, A., & Brawer, F.B. (2003). *The American community college.* Jossey: Bass.

Cole, N. L. (2019a). *What are racial projects.* ThoughtCo. https://www.thoughtco.com/racial-project-3026510

Cole, N. L. (2019b). *What is racial formation theory.* ThoughtCo. https://www.thoughtco.com/racial-formation-3026509

Coleman J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, 95-120. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780243

Community College Research Center. (2013). *What we know about nonacademic student supports.* https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-we-know-about-nonacademic-student-supports.pdf

Community College Research Center. (2021). Community college FAQs. Community College Research Center. Retrieved from https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html

Community College Research Center. (2023). *Community college FAQs.* https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/community-college-faqs.html

Complete College America. (2021). *Predominantly Black and historically Black community colleges.* https://completecollege.org/predominantly-Black-and-historically-Black-community-colleges/

Complete College America. (2022). Historically Black and predominantly Black community colleges unite to create first-of-its-kind national network. https://completecollege.org/resource/historically-Black-and-predominantly-Black-community-colleges-unite-to-create-first-of-its-kind-national-network/

Creswell, J. D. & Creswell, J. W. (2017). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Sage.

Creswell, J. & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage

Crim, D. B.. (2021). Hard Row to Hoe: Unearthing the Barriers, Challenges & Resiliency of African American Women Presidents at Baccalaureate Institutions (Publication No. 28547016) [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Wisconsin - Madison]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Crowe, M. (2022). *Economic vitality and education in The South.* Southern Education Foundation. https://southerneducation.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/economic-vitality-and-education-in-the-south-par-1-eves-1_final.pdf

Darling-Hammond, L. (1998). *Unequal opportunity: Race and education.* Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/

Dayal, S. (2021). *Community colleges: A critical access point to higher education.* Candid. https://blog.candid.org/post/community-colleges-a-critical-access-point-to-higher-education/

Debusmann, B. (2023). *Affirmative actionL US Supreme Court overturns race-based college admissions.* BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-65886212

Dixon, P., & Dundes, L. (2020). Exceptional injustice: Facebook as a reflection of race-and gender-based narratives following the death of George Floyd. *Social Science, 9*, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9120231

Duncan, A.G. (2021). *Community colleges dedicated to helping Black students are finding new support.* Lumina Foundation. https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/community-colleges-dedicated-to-helping-Black-students-are-finding-new-support/

Eddy, Pamela L. (2010). *Partnerships and collaborations in higher education*. School of Education Book Chapters. 38. https://scholarworks.wm.edu/educationbookchapters/38

Edgecomb, N. (2023). *Public funding of community colleges.* Community College Research Center. https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/public-funding-community-colleges.html

Economic Research Service. (2017). *Rural education at a glance*. https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/83078/eib171_forprinting.pdf?v= 42830

Elliott, K. C., Warshaw, J.B., & Gregory, C. A. (2019). Historically Black community colleges: A descriptive profile and call for context-based future research. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 43*(10-11), 770-784. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2019.1600612

Espinosa, L. L., Turk, M. K., Taylor, M. & Chessman, H. M. (2019). *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report*. American Council on Education.

https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Race-and-Ethnicity-in-Higher-Education.aspx

Evatt, W. D. (2019). *White scripts in higher education: White administrators navigating racial equity and inclusion effort*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Appalachian State University.

Friese, S. (2012). *Qualitative Data Analysis with ATLAS.ti*. Sage

Fusch, P., Fusch, G. E., & Ness, L. R., (2018). Denzin's paradigm shift: Revisiting triangulation in qualitative research. *Journal of Social Change, 10*(1), 19-32. http://dx.doi.org/10.5590/JOSC.2018.10.1.02

Gasman, M. (2008). Minority-serving institutions: A historical backdrop. In M. Gasman, B. Baez, & C. S. V. Turner (Eds.), *Understanding minority-serving institutions* (pp. 18–27). State University of New York Press.

Gasman, M. (2013). *The changing face of historically Black colleges and universities*. Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions. http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/335

Gasman, M., & Commodore, F. (2014). The state of research on historically Black colleges and universities. *Journal for Multicultural Studies, 8*(2), 89-111. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1108/JME-01-2014-0004

Geroge, J. (2021). *A lesson on critical race theory.* American Bar Association. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/civil-rights-reimagining-policing/a-lesson-on-critical-race-theory/

Giancola, J, & Davidson, E. (2015). *Breaking down walls: Increasing access to four-year colleges for high achieving community college students.* Jack Kent Cooke Foundation.

https://www.jkcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/JKCF_Break_Down_Walls_WP-FULL-REPORT.pdf

Glass Jr., J. C, & Jackson, K. L. (1998). Integrating resource development and institutional planning. Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 22, 715-739. https://doi.org/10.1080/1066892980220802

Goldrick-Rab, S., Richardson, J., & Hernandez, A. (2017). *Hungry and homeless in college: Results from a national study of basic needs insecurity in higher education*. Wisconsin HOPE Lab. https://www.acct.org/files/Publications/2017/Homeless_and_Hungry_2017.pdf

Gonzalez, M. (2023). *Why are DEI roles disappearing?.* Society for Human Resource Management. https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/global-and-cultural-effectiveness/pages/why-are-dei-roles-disappearing-.aspx

Grace, G.. G. (2002). Student affairs collaborations and partnerships. *New Directions for Student Services, 100*, 3-11. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.66

Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, reflexivity and ethically important moments in research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 10*(2), 261–280. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough?: An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, *18*(1), 59-82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Haines, M. (2021). *Effects of Jim Crow era live on on modern America, some say.* Voices of America. https://www.voanews.com/a/usa_effects-jim-crow-era-live-modern-america-some-say/6204908.html

Hallett, R. E. & Freas, A. (2018). Community college students' experiences with homelessness and housing insecurity. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 42*(10), 724-739. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2017.1356764

Harper, S. (2023). *Why business leaders are pulling the plug on DEI.* Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/shaunharper/2023/07/18/why-corporate-execs-are-pulling-the-plug-on-dei/?sh=6f244b3743d4

Harper, S. R. & Simmons, I. (2020). *Black students at public colleges and universities: A 50 state report card.* USC Race and Equity Center. https://race.usc.edu/research/

Harper, S. R., Banks, J. A., Darling-Hammond, L., Gutiérrez, K. D., Ladson-Billings, G., Lee, C. D., & Tierney, W. D. (2020). The elusive quest for civil rights in education. USC Race and Equity Center. https://race.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pub-15-Harper-Banks-Darling-Hammond-Gutierrez-Ladson-Billings-Lee-and-Tierney.pdf

Haviland, S., & Robbins, S. (2021). Career and technical education as a conduit for skilled technical careers: A targeted research review and framework for future research. *ETS Research Report Series,1*, 1–42. https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12318

Hickson, H. (2016). Becoming a critical narrativist: Using critical reflection and narrative inquiry as research methodology. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice, 15*(3), 380–391. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325015617344

Holzer H. J., & Xu, Z. (2019). Community college pathways for disadvantaged students (IZA Discussion Paper No. 12319). IZA Institute of Labor Economics. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3390308

Hurley, L. (2023). *Supreme Court strikes down college affirmative action programs.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/supreme-court/supreme-court-strikes-affirmative-action-programs-harvard-unc-rcna66770

Institute for Research on Higher Education. (2016). *College affordability diagnosis: National report.* http://www2.gse.upenn.edu/irhe/affordability-diagnosis

Irwin, B., & Patrick, T. (2016). Symbiosis: Community colleges strengthen mission by engaging their host communities through innovative partnerships. *Planning for Higher Education, 45*(1), 118-126. https://proxying.lib.ncsu.edu/index.php/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/symbiosis-community-colleges-strengthen-mission/docview/1871513845/se-2?accountid=12725

Jackson C. K., Johnson R. C., Persico C. (2016). The effects of school spending on educational and economic outcomes: Evidence from school finance reforms. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *131*, 157–218. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv036

Jacobson, L., LaLonde, R., & Sullivan, D. G. (2005). Estimating the returns to community college schooling for displaced workers. *Journal of Econometrics, 125*(1–2), 271–304. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeconom.2004.04.010

Jan, T., McGregor, J., & Hoyer, M. *Corporate America's $50 billion promise.* The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/interactive/2021/george-floyd-corporate-america-racial-justice/

Jenkins, D., & Weiss, M. J. (2011). Charting pathways to completion for low-income community college students (CCRC Working Paper No. 34). Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center. https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/charting-pathways-to-completion.html

Jones, B. (2019). *Predominantly Black institutions: Pathways to Black student educational attainment.* Center for Minority Serving Institutions. https://cmsi.gse.rutgers.edu/content/predominantly-Black-institutions-pathways-Black-student-educational-attainment

Kallio, H., Pietlia, A., Johnson, M., & Docent, P. K. (2016). Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for qualitative in-depth interview guide. *The Journal of Advanced Nursing, 72*(12), 2949-3217. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1111/jan.13031

Keeling, R. P. (2014). An ethic of care in higher education: Well-being and learning. *Journal of College and Character, 15*(3), 141-148. DOI: 10.1515/jcc-2014-0018

Kelchin, R. (2015). *Exploring the topic of indirect costs to today's higher education students.* American Council on Education. https://acenet.edu/Documents/Quick-Hits-Indirect-Costs.pdf

Kelchin, R. (2019). Exploring the relationship between performance based funding design and underrepresented student enrollment at community colleges. *Community College Review, 47*(4), 323-461. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1177/0091552119865611

Kim, J. (2016). *Understanding Narrative Inquiry.* Sage

Knox, J. (2022). *Hey! What about predominantly Black institutions?.* Inside Higher Ed. https://www.diverseeducation.com/opinion/article/15289538/hey-what-about-predominately-Black-institutions

Knox, L. (2023). *Higher ed charitable giving up by double digits.* Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2023/02/15/donations-higher-ed-had-biggest-boost-20-years

Koicich, M.A. (2014). *The effects of rurality on college access and choice*. [Master's Thesis, Texas Tech University]. AERA

Kornbluh, M. (2015). Combatting challenges to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 12*, 397-414. DOI: 10.1080/14780887.2015.1021941

Kumah-Abiwu, F. (2023). Philanthropic funding and the future of HBCUs. In K. R. Roth, Kumah-Abiwu, F. & Ritter, Z.S. (Eds.), *Emancipatory change in US higher education* (pp. 19-240). Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

Lederman, D. (2022). *Diversity on the rise among college presidents*. Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/02/14/colleges-have-hired-more-minority-presidents-amid-racial-reckoning

Ledesma, M. C., & Calderon, D. (2015). Critical race theory in education: A review of past literature and a look to the future. *Qualitative inquiry 21*, (3), 206-222. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1177/1077800414557825

Levenson, E. (2021). *Former officer knelt on George Floyd for 9 minutes and 29 seconds—Not the infamous 8:46.* CNN News. https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/29/us/george-floyd-timing-929-846/index.html

Levesque, E. M. (2018). *Improving community college completion rates by addressing structural and motivational barriers.* Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/community-college-completion-rates-structural-and-motivational-barriers/

Levitz, J. Ailworth, E. & Hobbs, T. D. (2020). *George Floyd and Derek Chauvin: The lives of the victim and his killer.* Wall Street Journal. https://www.wsj.com/articles/george-floyd-andderek-chauvin-the-lives-of-the-victim-and-his-killer-11592761495

Lew, E. (2019). Effect of social and cultural capital and supportive programs on higher education aspirations and transfer intention of community college hospitality management students (Publication No. 27548676) [Doctoral dissertation, Iowa State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Library of Congress. (n.d.) *The Civil Rights Acts of 1964: A long struggle for freedom.* https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/epilogue.html#:~:text=It%20enabled%20Blacks%2C%20women%2C%20and,wake%20of%20the%20act's%20enforcement.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

Long, B. T. & Riley, E. (2007). Financial aid: A broken bridge to college access?. *Harvard Educational Review*, *77*(1), 39–63. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.77.1.765h8777686r7357

Lumina Foundation. (n.d.) *Beyond financial aid strategies.* https://www.luminafoundation.org/campaign/beyond-financial-aid/bfa-strategies/strategy-3-build-internal-and-external-partnerships/

Luppino, J. (2020). *Fear of the other race: Decades of institutional racism, unfair legislation, and hatred.* [Doctoral thesis, Ramapo College]. Ramapo Journal of Law & Society

Marcus, J. (2023). *Community colleges face low enrollment, dismal completion rates.* PBS News Hour. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/community-colleges-face-low-enrollment-dismal-completion-rates

McCants, J. (2003). *The early history of the Higher Education Act of 1965*. National Trio Clearinghouse. https://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/trio_clearinghouse-The_Early_History_of_the_HEA_of_1965.pdf

McCarthy, M. A. (2015). *Flipping the paradigm: Why we need training-based pathways to the bachelor's degree and how to build them*. New America. https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/11652-flipping-the-paradigm/Flipping-the-Paradigm.0f26409a95ec4052987af5d3084d47

McConville, S., Bohn, S., Brooks, B., & Dadgar, M. (2021). *Improving career education pathways into California's workforce*. Public Policy Institute of California. https://www.ppic.org/publication/improving-career-education-pathways-intocalifornias-workforce/

Melidona, D., Cecil, B. G., Cassell, A., Chessman, H. M. (2023). *The American College President: 2023 Edition*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education

Melguizo, T., Kienzl, G. S., Alfonso, M, (2011). Comparing the educational attainment of community college transfer students and four-year college rising juniors using propensity score matching methods. *The Journal of Higher Education, 82*(3), 265-291. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2011.0013

Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative Research.* Jossey-Bass.

Minaya, V. & Scott-Clayton, J. (2022). Labor market trajectories for community college graduates: How returns to certificates and associate degrees evolve over time. *Education Finance & Policy, 17*(1), 53-80. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1162/edfp_a_00325

Mishory, J., Huelsman, M., & Khan, S. (2019). *How student debt and the racial wealth gap reinforce each other.* The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/bridging-progressive-policy-debates-student-debt-racial-wealth-gap-reinforce/

Mitchell, F. (2021). *By investing in The South, philanthropy can reduce Black children's inequality.* Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/investing-south-philanthropy-can-reduce-Black-childrens-inequality

Morris, J. E. & Monroe, C. R. (2000). Why study the U.S. South? The nexus of race and place in investigating Black student achievement. *Educational Reseacher, 38*(1), 21-36.https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0013189X08328876

Moody, J. (2022). *Colleges report strong fundraising year.* Inside Higher Ed. https://insidehighered.com/news/2022/08/18/colleges-report-strong-fundraising-fiscal-year-2022

Mountjoy, Jack. 2022. Community Colleges and Upward Mobility. *American Economic Review, 112*(8), 2580-2630. DOI: 10.1257/aer.20181756

Museus, S.D., Ledesma, M.C. and Parker, T.L. (2015), Racism and racial equity in higher education. ASHE. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1002/aehe.20067

National Archives. (2022). *Morrill Act (1862).* https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/morrill-act

National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. (2023). *Affirmative Action.* https://www.naicu.edu/policy-advocacy/issue-brief-index/regulation/affirmative-action

Nellums, J. (2023). *Universities need to mount an offensive for diversity, equity, and inclusion.* The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/commentary/universities-need-to-mount-an-offensive-for-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/

Nickerson, C. (2023). *Social construction of reality.* Simple Sociology. https://simplysociology.com/social-construction-of-reality.html

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving the meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16,* 1-13. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1609406917733847

O'Banion, T. (2023). *The community college has become the nation's engine for job training.* The evolllution. https://evolllution.com/the-community-college-has-become-the-nations-engine-for-job-training

Omi, M. & Winant, H. (2015). *Racial formation in the United States.* Routledge

Opportunity Insights, (n.d.) *Absolute income mobility by child birth cohort and state.* https://opportunityinsights.org/data/?geographic_level=103&topic=0&paper_id=0#resource-listing

Otter AI. Otter AI, Inc., 2021. https://otter.ai

Palinkas L.A., Horwitz S.M., Green C.A., Wisdom J.P., Duan N., Hoagwood K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health Services Research, 42*(5), 533-44. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Palmore, S. (2023). *Show up and stay: Why The South needs philanthropy to lead the movement for racial equity.* MDC. https://www.mdcinc.org/2023/10/11/show-up-and-stay-why-the-south-needs-philanthropy-to-lead-in-the-movement-for-racial-equity/

Perna, L.W., Gerald, D., Baum, E. (2007). The status of equity for Black faculty and administrators in public higher education in The South. *Research in Higher Education, 48*, 193–228. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1007/s11162-006-9041-4

Perry, A. M. (2014). *Stop blaming Black parents for underachieving kids.* The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/07/30/stop-blaming-Black-parents-for-underachieving-kids/

Persky, J. (2021). Higher education and the ethic of care: Finding ways forward during a global pandemic. *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies*, *21*(3), 301-305. https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1177/15327086211002776

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 8,* 5-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839950080103

Pino Gavidia, L. A., and Adu, J. (2022). Critical narrative inquiry: An examination of a methodological approach. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 21*(1 - 5). https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/16094069221081594

Higher Education Act. S.371 (2008).

Pratt. T. (2016). *The new North-South divide: public higher education.* The Hechinger Report. https://hechingerreport.org/new-north-south-divide-public-higher-education/#:~:text=Southern%20states%20have%20been%20disproportionately,slew%20of%20recent%20data%20show.

Preston, D. C. (2017). *Untold Barriers for Black Students in Higher Education: Placing Race at the Center of Developmental Education*. Southern Education Foundation. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED585873

Prince, R. A. (2016). *The seven faces of philanthropy (why the wealthy give to charity).* Forbes. https://forbes.com/sites/russalanprince/2016/03/08/the-seven-faces-of-philanthropy-why-the-wealthy-give-to-charity/?sh=2dedf8247ad8

Prueter, B. (2019). *Predominantly Black institutions: Pathways to Black student educational attainment.* Postsecondary National Policy Institute. https://pnpi.org/predominantly-Black-institutions-pathways-to-Black-student-educational-attainment/

Research Administration and Compliance, (2023, October 24). *Human Subjects (IRB).* https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/compliance/research-compliance/irb/

Rutgers Center for Minority-Serving Institutions. (2018). *MSI directory*. https://cmsi.gse.rutgers.edu/msi-directory

Robson, K., Schiess, J. O., & Trinidad, J. (2019). *Education in the American South: Historical context, current state, and future possibilities.* Bellwether Education Partners. https://bellwether.org/publications/education-american-south-historical-context-current-state-and-future-possibilities/

Rodriguez, F. C. & Escobar, C. (2023). The application of racial equity and social justice framework to examine community college leadership. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 202,* 145-158. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20575

Scheld, J. (2023). The path to a bachelor's degree: The effect of starting at a community college. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, 23*(8), 164 - 218.

Shaw, K., Asher, L. & Murphy, S. (2023). *Mapping community college finance systems to develop equitable and effective finance policy.* Lumina Foundation. http://www.luminafoundation.org/mapping.community.college.finance.systems

Sheldon, C. Q. (2003). The impact of financial crises on access and support services in community colleges. *Community College Review, 31*, 73-90. https://doi.org/10.1177/009155210303100204

Symthe, W.E., & Murray, M. J. (2000). Owning the story: Ethical considerations in narrative research. *Ethics and Behaviour, 10*(4), 311–336. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327019EB1004_1

Socina, V. E., & Weathers, E. S. (2019). Pathways to Inequality: Between-District Segregation and Racial Disparities in School District Expenditures, *AERA Open, 5*(3), https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858419872445

St. Amour, M. (2020, September 30). *Traditional success metrics not enough*. Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/09/30/report-community-colleges-need-use-more-traditional-metrics-success

Stanley, C. A. (2006). Coloring the academic landscape: Faculty of color breaking the silence in predominantly white colleges and universities. *American Educational Research Journal, 43*(4), 701–736. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4121775

Stefancic, J., & Delgado,R. (2010). *Critical race theory: An introduction.* https://scholarship.law.ua.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1046&context=fac_working_papers

Stokes, J. (2021). *How to do media and cultural studies*. Sage

Strada Center for Education Consumer Insights. (2020). *Public viewpoint: Enrolling in education: Motivations, barriers, and expectations.* https://cci.stradaeducation.org/pv-release-july-15-2020/

Suazo deCastro, B., & Karp, M. M. (2009). *A typology of community college-based partnership activities.* Community College Research Center. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cclo/cc-partnerships.pdf

Taquette, S. R., & Borges da Matta Souza, L. M. (2022). Ethical dilemmas in qualitative research: A critical literature review. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *21*. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221078731

The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. (2009). *Constructing a racial equity theory of change: A practical guide for designing strategies to close chronic racial outcome gaps.* https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/images/Roundtable%20on%20Community%20Change%20RETOC.pdf

The Chronicle of Higher Education. (2023). *DEI legislation tracker.* https://www.chronicle.com/article/here-are-the-states-where-lawmakers-are-seeking-to-ban-colleges-dei-efforts

The Education Trust. (2022). *School districts that serve students of color receive significantly less funding.* https://edtrust.org/press-release/school-districts-that-serve-students-of-color-receive-significantly-less-funding/#:~:text=WASHINGTON%20%E2%80%93%20Across%20the%20country%2C%20districts,$13.5%20million%20in%20missing%20resources.

The Education Trust. (2023). *Affirmative action in higher education: Moving the conversation forward.* https://edtrust.org/affirmative-action/

The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2015). *Federal and state funding of higher education: A changing landscape.* https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2015/06/federal-and-state-funding-of-higher-education

Toraif, N., Gondal, N., Paudel, P., & Frisellaa, A. (2023). From colorblind to systemic racism: Emergence of a rhetorical shift in higher education discourse in response to the murder of George Floyd. *PLoS ONE 18*(8) https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0289545

Totenburg, N. (2023). *Supreme Court guts affirmative action, effectively ending race-conscious admissions.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2023/06/29/1181138066/affirmative-action-supreme-court-decision

Troester-Tate, K. (2018). *Breaking down nonacademic barriers: Outcomes for the first two years of a community school approach.* League for Innovation in the Community College. https://www.league.org/innovation-showcase/breaking-down-nonacademic-barriers-outcomes-first-two-years-community-school

Tucker, M., Poon, J., & Greenwell, S. (2023). Dual enrollment, first-year retention, and graduation: Analyzing the impact of dual enrollment on student success outcomes at a public research university. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, 23*(9), 105 - 130.

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Predominantly Black Institutions Program - Formula Grants.* https://www2.ed.gov/programs/pbihea/index.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2023). Education and Title VI. Office of Civil Rights. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq43e4.html#:~:text=Title%20VI%20of%20the%20Civil%20Rights%20Act%20of%201964%20protects,that%20receive%20Federal%20financial%20assistance.

Weissman, S. (2021). *A leg up for diverse adult learners.* Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/09/07/supporting-adults-historically-Black-community-colleges#.YTdsKzAVpco.twitter

Weissman, S. (2022). *Black enrollment declines, gaps increase.* Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/09/21/Black-community-college-students-face-stark-disparities

Worthen, B.R. (2001). 'Whither evaluation? That all depends. T*he American Journal of Evaluation, (22)*3, 409–418. https://doi.org/10.1177/109821400102200319

WittKieffer. (2019). Best practices in higher education presidential searches: Recommendations and guiding principles for recruiting exceptional academic leaders. https://wittkieffer.com/insights/best-practices-in-higher-education-presidential-search

Yuen V. (2020). *The $78 billion community college shortfall.* Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/78-billion-community-college-funding-shortfall/

Zeidenberg, M., Scott, M., & Belfield, C. (2015). What about non-completers? The labor market returns to progress in community college. *Economics of Education Review, 49,* 142-156. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2015.09.004 0272-7757/

Zoom Video Communications, Inc. (2024). ZOOM cloud meetings (Version 5.17.11) [Desktop client]. https://zoom.us/start/videomeeting

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Recruitment Email

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL TIME SENSITIVE REQUEST

Hello _____,

My name is Tiffani Polk, 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: Partnering with Predominantly Black Community Colleges: A Narrative Inquiry under the direction of my committee chair, Dr. Carrol Warren.

What?: Based upon **your expertise** and **potential to add value** to my study, ***I would like to invite you to participate***. If you have an interest, it will take approximately 5 minutes to fill out the pre-screening form - (*Qualtrics link here*). If you indicate your interest in an interview on the form, I will then contact you to schedule a 60-90 minute recorded Zoom interview on a day and time that works best for you. I can assure you that your identity and the identity of your employing institution will be protected and will remain confidential throughout this process. You will be able to withdraw at any time from this study.

Why?: In order to fulfill requirements for my dissertation, I am conducting a study of Historically Black Community Colleges /Predominantly Black Community Colleges administrative leaders who have collaborated with external education partners. ***I am particularly seeking to learn more about partnerships that have been an effort to support, develop, and enhance equitable pathways to credential attainment and employment outcomes*.**

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 and will remain confidential throughout this process.

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!
Tiffani Polk, M.Ed.
Graduate Student - Community College Leadership
North Carolina State University

APPENDIX B

Participant Interest Screening

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Thank you for participating in my research study about Historically Black Community Colleges/Predominantly Black Community Colleges administrative leaders who have collaborated with external education 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 five minutes of your time.

Q1 Please enter the name of your institution.

_____

Q2 Please enter your current title.

_____

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

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

Skip To: End of Survey If During your current tenure, have you been involved in facilitating, leading, establishing external partnerships for your institution? **= No**

Q4 Would you be interested in participating in a virtual interview which will help inform my research on Historically Black Community Colleges/Predominantly Black Community Colleges administrative leaders who have collaborated with external education 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 on Historically Black Community Colleges/Predominantly Black Community Colleges administrative leaders who have collaborated with external education partners. The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes and your identity will remain confidential. **= No**

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Block 1

Q19 To proceed, please read the consent form. After the consent form, you will be asked to fill out a few demographic questions and 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, Tiffani Polk, 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 26731 when contacting anyone about this study.

Q22 Please select your response to the consent form.

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

o Yes, I want to be in this research study. (2)

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: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Q8 The following questions collect demographic information.

Q7 Please indicate your Race/Ethnicity

- ☐ **American Indian or Alaska Native (4)**
- ☐ **Asian (5)**
- ☐ **Black or African American (6)**
- ☐ **Hispanic or Latino (7)**
- ☐ **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (8)**
- ☐ **White (9)**

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 Masters Degree (3)**
- **o Post-Graduate Certificate (4)**
- **o Doctoral Degree (5)**

Q10 Please indicate the number of years experience in your professional career.

_____

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

_____

End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Interview Scheduling

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

Q2 Please list up to 10 dates and times in which you are available through February 7th, 2024, from 8am - 8pm. Interviews will take 60-90 minutes.
Please rank your availability (best option first).

_____

_____

_____

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 C

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 Community College & Predominantly Black Community College administrative leaders who have collaborated with external 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.

Best Regards,
Tiffani
Tiffani Polk, M.Ed.
Graduate Student - Community College Leadership
North Carolina State University

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Partnering with Predominantly Black Community Colleges: A Narrative Inquiry (eIRB #)
Principal Investigator(s): Tiffani Polk, [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 Community Colleges/ Predominantly Black Community Colleges collaboration with external education 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 Community Colleges/ Predominantly Black Community Colleges who have collaborated with external education 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 Community College/Predominantly Black Community College, serve in a president, vice-president, provost, dean, and executive director role, and have experience working with an external education 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 education 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, Tiffani Polk, [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.

Emergency medical treatment
If you are hurt or injured during the study session(s), the researcher will call 911 for necessary care. There is no provision for compensation or free medical care for you if you are injured as a result of this study.

What if you are a student?
Your participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation, or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades.

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, Tiffani Polk, [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 [redacted], 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.

APPENDIX E

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 Community Colleges/Predominantly Black Community Colleges collaboration with external education 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, name of your employer, and name of the school you attend 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. You have already signed the informed consent form online, thank you for completing that. 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.)

Interview Questions

Tiffani's Questions	Follow-Up / Prompts
What prompted your interest in working at a Predominantly Black Institution?	
Think of a partnership that exists at your institution and describe the process of developing it.	Who is involved? What are the steps? Who makes the final decision?
What factors help administrators determine whether to enter or not to enter partnerships with external organizations?	Are there certain values (characteristics) that you most look for in a partner?
What challenges have you faced with developing partnerships or working with external partners?	Have you ever had to end a relationship, why?
What are the challenges that you are striving to fix when partnering (gaps being filled)?	Non academic needs, belonging, credential attainment, job readiness, outcomes, etc.?
What would create an ideal situation / partnership for increased credential and job attainment at your institution?	What type of partnership do you wish you had?
What is your perception of funders' / external partner's interest in your type of institution? Willingness to partner with your institution	Do you feel that partners are seeking you out? (Neglected in these efforts?)
How does your institution discover external partnerships to pursue?	Do you all leverage word of mouth, an observation of another school or colleague's experience?
Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with partnership development that we have not talked about?	

Do you have any colleagues who would be valuable contributors to this study? (collect email/contact information offline)

Thank you – this will conclude our time together. You will be provided via email a copy of the transcript and instructions for reviewing. I appreciate your time and wish you success as you continue your work with partnership development.

Interview Questions

Tiffani's Questions	Follow-Up / Prompts	Which Themes Does this Q connect to?	RFT?	Concep. Frame?
What prompted your interest in working at a Predominantly Black Institution?				
Think of a partnership that exists at your institution and describe the process of developing it.	Who is involved? What are the steps? Who makes the final decision?	• Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships • The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development	X	X
What factors help administrators determine whether to enter or not to enter partnerships with external organizations?	Are there certain values (characteristics) that you most look for in a partner?	• Systemic Challenges In Higher Education • The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development	X	X
What challenges have you faced with developing	Have you ever had to end a relationship, why?	• Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships	X	

partnerships or working with external partners?		• The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development		
What are the challenges that you are striving to fix when partnering (gaps being filled)?	Non academic needs, belonging, credential attainment, job readiness, outcomes, etc.?	• Systemic Challenges Facing Higher Education Institutions • Equity in Programming and Curriculum Design	X	X
What would create an ideal situation / partnership for increased credential and job attainment at your institution?	What type of partnership do you wish you had?	• Institutional Values Reflected in External Partnerships • Systemic Challenges In Higher Education • Equity in Programming and Curriculum Design		X
What is your perception of funders' / external partner's interest in your type of institution? Willingness to partner with your institution	Do you feel that partners are seeking you out? (Neglected in these efforts?)	• The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development		X
How does your institution discover external partnerships to pursue?	Do you all leverage word of mouth, an observation of another school or colleague's experience?	• The Importance of Engaged Leadership in Partnership Development	X	X

APPENDIX F

NC State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Date: January 11, 2024
Study Title: Partnering with Predominantly Black Community Colleges: A Narrative Inquiry
NC State eIRB #: 26731
Funding Source: N/A

Dear Carrol Adams Warren,

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved on January 11, 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
irb-director@ncsu.edu
919.515.8754