Stakeholder Engagement: A Case Study of a Long-term Partnership
Between a University and a Non-profit Organization

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Abstract

The world has progressed at unprecedented rates in recent years, but a majority of teaching styles and the delivery of instruction has barely changed since the inception of education. How can higher education institutions prepare students for a new age, when they continue to use outdated techniques? The intended exchange for college tuition is the receipt of useful knowledge that contributes to securing financially and self-fulfilling employment upon graduation. However, substantial changes in the workforce due to a declined economy, unsteady hiring trends, and the increase in globalization have left many debt-burdened students unemployed or underemployed. There is a theoretical and practical misalignment in cultivating workplace readiness and global citizenship in students because partnerships are not being optimized between stakeholders. It is well known that cooperative education and internship increases employment prospects, and community service nurtures civic engagement, but what else can be done to support these initiatives while students are on campus and in class? The opportunity for strategic partnerships to collaboratively manage project-based learning (PBL) offers an innovative curricular solution that integrates the needs and resources of multiple stakeholder groups.

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to understand the long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization by describing the interactions and influences of stakeholder engagement. While partnerships are becoming the norm in higher education, this case study described how stakeholders engaged in an inter-organizational arrangement which contributed to over a decade’s worth of PBL to revitalize a Rhode Island cultural center. This study has implications for higher education institutions, industry, community groups, and government agencies, as well as current students, recent graduates and alumni. The key findings of this research concluded that: (A) stakeholder alignment deepens engagement by increasing the longevity of partnership and maximizing the reach of impact; (B) the effectiveness of partnership is enhanced when resources are shared within the university and across the non-profit organization; and (C) faculty are the driving force of pedagogical change and are central to the sustainability of partnership.

Keywords: stakeholder engagement, project-based learning, higher education, community engagement, workforce readiness, global citizenship, stakeholder theory, strategic partnership, experiential education, experiential learning
Dedication

This study is dedicated to all the students who do not fit the stereotypical profile of an academic, from whom I am inspired and to whom I wish to give inspiration to continue striving because success is customizable and need not be confined by the expectations of others. To those stakeholders who believe in the collective value of community-centric, project-based learning and make the choice to contribute resources that sustain this approach, thank you for your continuous impact on society, and for all the ways you have encouraged me to be a better person.
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Obtaining a doctoral degree has been emotionally and physically trying. The accomplishment of this research validates my ability to withstand the academic rigor required to excel as a scholar-practitioner which was never originally part of my plan. In fact, as a technical-vocational high school student, I did not contemplate attending college at all until senior-year. I feel extremely blessed that somehow, someway, this became my path.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Chapter 1: Introduction**
- Problem of Practice .................................................................................................................. 11
- Problem statement ......................................................................................................................... 13
- Purpose ....................................................................................................................................... 13
- Significance .................................................................................................................................. 13
- Research Questions ..................................................................................................................... 20
- Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................................. 20
- Key Terminology .......................................................................................................................... 28
- Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 30

**Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**
- Experiential Education Through Project-based Learning .......................................................... 31
  - Project-based learning .................................................................................................................. 38
  - Challenges .................................................................................................................................... 43
- Strategic Partnerships ................................................................................................................... 46
  - Higher education and industry partnerships ................................................................................. 47
  - Higher education and community partnerships ........................................................................... 51
  - Higher education and government partnerships .......................................................................... 54
  - Intercollegiate partnerships ......................................................................................................... 57
- Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 59

**Chapter 3: Research Design**
- Qualitative Research ................................................................................................................... 60
  - Unit of analysis ............................................................................................................................ 61
  - Research tradition ......................................................................................................................... 62
  - Research paradigm ......................................................................................................................... 63
    - Role of the researcher .................................................................................................................. 64
      - Positionality statement .............................................................................................................. 64
- Research Sites .............................................................................................................................. 67
- Participants .................................................................................................................................... 69
  - Recruitment and access ............................................................................................................... 70
  - Ethical considerations .................................................................................................................. 71
Data Collection ......................................................................................................................73
Data Storage ..........................................................................................................................78
Data Management ................................................................................................................78
Data Analysis ..........................................................................................................................79
Trustworthiness .......................................................................................................................83
Summary ....................................................................................................................................85

Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings ..................................................................................86
Case Background ......................................................................................................................86
Participant Profiles ..................................................................................................................98
Overview of Themes .................................................................................................................100
  Theme 1: stakeholder alignment ............................................................................................100
  Theme 2: engagement as a result of individual interests and organizational commitment ...108
  Theme 3: characteristics of stakeholders that contribute to the cohesiveness of partnership ...111
  Theme 4: system-wide support .............................................................................................112
  Theme 5: reciprocity of interconnected stakeholders ................................................................115
  Theme 6: dynamics warranting continued stakeholder engagement .......................................122
  Theme 7: dedication to reimagining the delivery of education .................................................131
Summary ....................................................................................................................................142

Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings ............................................................................143
Stakeholder Engagement ..........................................................................................................145
Conclusion A: Stakeholder Alignment Deepens Engagement by Increasing the Longevity of Partnership and Maximizing the Reach of Impact .................................................149
Conclusion B: The Effectiveness of Partnership is Enhanced When Resources are Shared Within the University and Across the Non-profit Organization ...............155
Conclusion C: Faculty are the Driving Force of Pedagogical Change and are Central to the Sustainability of Partnership .................................................................158
Discussion of the Literature ....................................................................................................163
Implications for Theory ............................................................................................................183
Implications for Practice ..........................................................................................................186
Recommendation 1: modify curriculum to include a required experiential education component .................................................................187

Recommendation 2: recognize the importance of experiential education through project-based learning in the tenure and promotion process .................................................................190

Recommendation 3: permit workload adjustments to accommodate faculty participation ...........................................................................191

Recommendation 4: allocate appropriate resources to promote innovation .................................................................................................192

Recommendation 5: develop an internal and external marketing campaign to increase awareness, generate leads and solidify branding .................................................................194

Implications for Research ...........................................................................................................................................................................196

Limitations ..................................................................................................................................................................................................197

Summary ........................................................................................................................................................................................................198

Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................................................................................199

References ..........................................................................................................................................................................................................201

List of Tables

Table 1. Presentation of Key Findings .........................................................................................................................................................144

List of Figures

Figure 1. The Method Improvement Cycle ...........................................................................................................................................164

Figure 2. Stakeholder Management Model ........................................................................................................................................165

Figure 3. The Process Flow of Stakeholder Engagement .......................................................................................................................165

Figure 4. Old PBL Model and New Gold Standard PBL Model ............................................................................................................170

Figure 5. Three Aspects of Stakeholder Theory ..................................................................................................................................184

Appendices

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approvals .................................................................................................................................234

Appendix B: Request to Participate .................................................................................................................................................................236

Appendix C: Signed Informed Consent Documents ............................................................................................................................237

Appendix D: Data Collection Plan and Timeline ....................................................................................................................................240

Appendix E: Interview Protocol .................................................................................................................................................................241

Appendix F: Observation Protocol ............................................................................................................................................................243

Appendix G: Johnson & Wales University Course Catalog Descriptions ................................................................................................244
Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the 1980s, there has been increasing pressure for higher education institutions (HEI) in the United States to support national economic regeneration and growth (Harvey, 2000). The Great Recession (2007 - 2010) considerably impacted employment and increased workforce competition among entry-level candidates, and as a result recent graduates have faced fierce rivalry in addition to steep qualification requirements as part of demanding hiring processes. The lack of appropriate education and experience immobilizes loan-burdened graduates from securing anticipated levels of employment, thus, raising return on investment and financial accountability concerns (Day, 2016).

The unemployment rate for bachelor’s degree graduates has been unsteady. Prior to the recession it was 2.1%, but by September 2009 it had reached its recessionary peak at 5.0% (NACE, 2015). Although unemployment dropped marginally over the next year, in November 2010 it had relapsed (NACE, 2015). The rate decreased as low as 3.4% in August 2013 and was followed by a slight increase to 3.8% in October 2013 (NACE, 2015). In 2014, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) released data by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics which indicated a regressing college labor market (NACE, 2014). The association reported a 0.7% rise in the unemployment rate for bachelor’s degree graduates between 2013 and 2014 (NACE, 2014). The unemployment rate for this population was 3.9% in April 2013, 3.3% in April 2014, and steadily fell to 2.7% in April 2015 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

Although entry-level employment outcomes prior to 2014 are unavailable (NACE’s First-Destination Survey was in development), the class of 2014 reported 52.5% of bachelor’s degree holders gaining employment within six months after graduation, and the class of 2015 fared
better with 82% (NACE, 2015; NACE, 2016a). Still, the 2015 results were geographically disproportionate, with some regions reporting only 50.2% employment (NACE, 2016a).

Fortunately for 2016 bachelor’s degree graduates, the unemployment rate decreased to 2.4% in April, the best it has been since June 2008 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). The final results for NACE’s Class of 2016 First-Destination Survey are scheduled to be released in Fall 2017 (NACE, 2017).

This resurgence of hope has its share of apprehensions. The substantial changes in the workforce due to a declined economy, unsteady hiring trends, and the increase in globalization continue to provoke the need for the systematic transformation of education (Sengel, 2004). Doing things because they have always been done that way is unacceptable (Dickeson, 2010), yet change requires HEI and employers to re-examine approaches that produce capable students who have the ability of practical application. Taghavian (2013) has suggested that industry and HEI partnerships are critical to economic development. The intended exchange for the cost of higher education is the receipt of useful knowledge, along with the increased likelihood of securing financially and self-fulfilling employment upon graduation (Day, 2016).

To thrive in the job market, potential hires must prove themselves worthy of consideration by demonstrating a balance of both academic and professional abilities (Conrad & Dunek, 2012; Day, 2016; Grant, Malloy, Murphy, Foreman, & Robinson, 2010; U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Labor, National Institute for Literacy, & U.S. Small Business Administration, 1999). However, standard teaching methodologies and traditional learning environments are outdated because they lack experiential preparation necessary for career readiness (Harden, 2012; Stommel, 2013; Wildavsky, Kelley & Carey, 2011). This means that even with recent record high unemployment rates, many jobs
remain vacant due to a perceived skills gap in student preparedness and because employers are expecting recent graduates to readily adapt to the world of work (Daud, Abidin, Sapuan & Rajadurai, 2011; Lasse, 2012; Wildavsky et al., 2011). This only reinforces the criticality of collegiate level experiential programs.

**Problem of Practice**

The world has progressed at unprecedented rates in recent years, but a majority of teaching styles and the delivery of instruction has barely changed since the inception of education. Historically, students paid tuition in exchange for the direct access to scholars along with information that was unattainable elsewhere, but as a result of technological advancements, accessibility is no longer an issue because information is retrievable at the stroke of a key, which brings into question the value of a formal education (Harden, 2012; Keeling & Hersh, 2016; McCluskey & Winter, 2012; Stoltzfus, 2014; Stommel, 2013). Day (2016) stated that “the value of a college degree depends on the intersection of financial cost, subject matter expertise, and ability to secure employment” (para. 3). Aside from imparting intellectual and personal growth, training students for thriving careers is an essential role of HEI (Dickeson, 2010; Keeling & Hersh, 2016). Knowledge attainment, career preparation and civic engagement are fundamental components of the education system (Ponder, Veldt, & Lewis-Ferrell, 2011). Therefore, a shift to modernize archaic approaches is necessary because “If we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow” (Dewey, 1944, p. 167). Stoltzfus (2014) affirmed:

> It is time for all educators to evaluate the possibility of transforming the lecture space, as learning is much more than the transfer of information; learning is about content, curiosity and relationships. Educators have the responsibility to provide and deliver content in a manner that will spike student curiosity, and foster relationships to share
knowledge. (para. 12)

The opportunity for strategic partnership to collaboratively manage project-based learning (PBL) offers an innovative curricular solution that integrates the resources between education, industry and the community, therefore readying graduates to enter the workforce with 21st-century skills, while also addressing the needs of the community (Cho & Brown, 2013; Rogers, 2014; Thompson & Jesiek, 2011).

PBL, an experiential education (EE) practice, is an active, inquiry-based learning approach and instructional methodology that develops participants’ communication, organizational, problem-solving, and technical skills, as well as other transferable skills derived from real-world practice. PBL becomes less about information transmission and instead demonstrates a practical approach to knowledge application. In other words, “Unlike a teacher-directed discussion, the students direct the discussion by following their inquiry where it leads. Contrasting unstructured discussion, the teacher becomes a thinking coach and trains students to engage in independent, productive discussion” (Golding, 2011, p. 474). PBL is centered around the group efforts of students “to plan, develop and assess a project that has a practical application” (Marquez-Lepe & Jimenez-Rodrigo, 2014, p. 78). It is customizable and can be implemented in a variety of design formats. For example, some are based on one-time hypothetical scenarios, while others are on-going genuine project work with real clients (Cho & Brown, 2013; Davidson, Jimenez, Onifade & Hankins, 2010). The latter PBL design considers individual and collective objectives, but it also requires extensive commitment from internal and external stakeholders, which can be difficult to sustain over a long period of time.
**Problem statement.** A theoretical and practical misalignment in cultivating workplace readiness and global citizenship in students exists because partnerships are not being optimized between stakeholders. Embedding higher education curriculum with authentic projects from real-life clients is a powerful strategy with far-reaching impacts (Grant et al., 2010). The literature has suggested that administrators, faculty, students, industry, community groups as well as local, state and federal government agencies all benefit from partnerships, as they directly influence political, social, and economic prosperity of communities (Lapan, Osana, Tucker, & Kosciulek, 2002; Manning, 2013). Partnerships utilize resources more efficiently, make financial sense, and result in better outcomes for those involved, so collaborative resources, programming, and integrative strategies that meet overlapping objectives of stakeholders should be better understood (Dickeson, 2010; Short & Shindell, 2009; Tamim & Grant, 2013). As it stands, research on “PBL addressing both business and educational needs has rarely been conducted” (Cho & Brown, 2013, p. 747). Although some higher education and community or higher education and industry partnerships are discussed in the literature, managing PBL from various administrative perspectives was found to be insufficient, thus warranting research regarding the dynamics of inter-organizational collaboration.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to understand the long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization by describing the interactions and influences of stakeholder engagement.

**Significance**

This study is especially significant for HEI, industry, students and graduates because employment outlooks are applying pressure to both college and labor markets. The stress is
prompting the reconsideration of educational approaches as well as job strategies for graduates (Conrad & Dunek, 2012). Subsequently, it is sparking the conversation of earlier preparation of candidates, resource allocation and the revitalization of ineffective partnerships. If unrectified, then the supply of qualified candidates will diminish, and disparaging consequences among stakeholders is likely to occur (Harvey, 2000). Currently in the United States about 69 million people work in middle-skill jobs, representing roughly 48% of the labor force (Kochan, Finegold & Osterman, 2012). Middle-skills are considered to be more advanced abilities than those associated with a high school diploma, but not quite at the level of a degreed individual. In anticipation of the baby boomer generation’s retirement, government data on education and training requirements lead labor market experts to estimate that as many as 25 million, or 47% of all new job openings from 2010 to 2020 will fall into the middle-skill range (Kochan et al., 2012). Still, jobs requiring high-skill derived from advanced education and training will experience the fastest employment growth (U. S. Department of Commerce et al., 1999).

In the past, a degree differentiated an individual by outlining a proven path to an advanced position, but now businesses look to recent graduates to fulfill entry-level positions and even then recruiters are often times disappointed in the experience level of candidates (Cook, Parker & Pettijohn, 2004; Day, 2016; Keeling & Hersh, 2016; U.S. Department of Commerce et al., 1999). In a competitive economy, the mastery of major-specific content is not adequate, as a formal degree merely meets a standard application qualification (Harvey, 2000; Keeling & Hersh, 2016; Qualters, 2010). Experiential Learning (EL) is beneficial because it maximizes the value of college degrees by equipping graduates with the skills necessary to manage the complexities of the professional environments in which they will be expected to perform after graduation (Conrad & Dunek, 2012; Daud et al., 2011; Day, 2016; Harvey, 2000; Nemko, 2008).
Without an increase in EL, “Higher education is not valuable enough to justify its price” (Keeling & Hersh, 2016, p. 3). Therefore, “Institutions themselves must recognize the changed realities and aggressively move to implement new approaches to instruction” (Wildavsky et al., 2011, p. 33) to increase the chances of student success on-campus and beyond.

Institutions that promote higher learning “should be held accountable for creating, offering (or requiring, in many cases), providing, and assessing [intentional learning experiences] in an effort to support student learning, achievement, and success” (Keeling & Hersh, 2016, p. 8). HEI are adopting business-like operations, so it makes sense that they too are held to similar corporate social responsibility (CSR) standards as other organizations. Filho, Wanderley, Gómez and Faracheefine (2010) have defined CSR as:

> The ethical relationship and transparency of the company with all its stakeholders that has a relationship as well as with the establishment of corporate goals that are compatible with the sustainable development of society, preserving environmental and cultural resources for future generations, respecting diversity and promoting the reduction of social problems. (p. 296)

CSR suggests that organizations have an economic responsibility to be profitable and a legal responsibility to obey the law, but they should also adhere to the ethical responsibilities of righteousness (Carroll, 1991). Yet a philosophical dichotomy of CSR exists. There are those who subscribe to the idea that as long as organizations are lawful, their sole focus should be on economic gains. In contrast, others strongly believe that organizations are obligated by social responsibilities to also be good corporate citizens by contributing to the community (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003). Green (2012) insisted that “Strengthening institutional commitment to serving society enriches the institution, affirms its relevance, and contributes to society, and benefits
Baldwin (2013) has claimed “Colleges are in the midst of a debt-fueled bubble” (para. 3). Student loan debt is a major contributing factor fueling economic challenges and has become a national issue due to the increasing default rates in the United States. Rules under the Obama Administration enforced government regulations, thereby driving program integrity by requiring HEI to report on gainful employment, including details of job placement disclosures, student debt levels and income after graduation; these rules assure that the value of educational programs are clearly and publicly presented (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). According to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, the rules:

strengthen federal student aid programs at for-profit, nonprofit and public institutions by protecting students from aggressive or misleading recruiting practices, providing consumers with better information about the effectiveness of career college and training programs, and ensuring that only eligible students or programs receive aid. ‘These new rules will help ensure that students are getting from schools what they pay for: solid preparation for a good job’. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, para. 1)

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2006) has detailed an inclusive shared ethical code of professional practice for higher education service. It is a compilation of individual codes and standards of ethical conduct, contributed by over 35 of its active professional association’s members. The following statements have been extrapolated from the inclusive list of principles to emphasize the commitment to those characteristics specifically aligned with this study:
Principle I – Autonomy:
- We hold ourselves and others accountable; We promote positive change in individuals and in society through education

Principle II – Non-Malfeasance:
- We collaborate with others for the good of those whom we serve

Principle III – Beneficence:
- We engage in altruistic attitudes and actions that promote goodness and contribute to the health and welfare of others; We work toward positive and beneficial outcomes

Principle IV – Justice:
- We actively promote human dignity and endorse equality and fairness for everyone

Principle V – Fidelity:
- We exercise good stewardship of resources

Principle VI – Veracity:
- We act with integrity and honesty in all endeavors and interactions

Principle VII – Affiliation:
- We actively promote connected relationships among all people and foster community; We create environments that promote connectivity; We promote authenticity, mutual empathy, and engagement within human interactions (pp.1-2)

The importance of this study is its recognition of stakeholder engagement (SE) as a vital connection point in progressing the work of various united groups forward. SE is a two-way approach “premised on the notion that ‘those groups who can affect or are affected by the achievements of an organisation’s purpose’ should be given the opportunity to comment and input into the development of decisions that affect them” (Jeffrey, 2009, p. 8). SE is a crucial component of CSR that broadly describes the on-going collaborative activities and decision making between an organization and its stakeholders which contributes to the success of an initiative, project, program, or shared objective (Jeffrey, 2009).

This research is relevant because it details the best practices for partnership and engagement that is mutually beneficial for a variety of stakeholders. It brings awareness to the
factors regarding a long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization with possible implications toward the improvement of the current and future state of education, the workforce, and the community. Additionally, this case study demonstrates how an inter-organizational partnership became highly effective as a result of extensive collaboration and integrated resources. The key findings have the potential to influence HEI and accrediting bodies and agencies to make the necessary changes within school policy, academic content, delivery models, and outcomes assessment to ensure graduates meet employment and societal demands.

EE is pivotal in student transformation, as it helps them move past the position of information consumers to that of educated practitioners with the ability to interpret as well as apply knowledge. EE is “A philosophy of education” (Itin, 1999, p. 91) defined as a process in which a participant acknowledges personal and professional growth as a result of knowledge and skills attained through direct experience (Association for Experiential Education, n.d.). Connecting students to hands-on EL opportunities throughout their college career is regarded in the literature as the most effective way for students to obtain a competitive edge in the job market (Kochan et al., 2012). EL is individually-centered learning that is gained through doing; observing, reflecting, and making meaning out of individual experiences. It is “the change in an individual that results from reflection on a direct experience and results in new abstractions and applications” (Itin, 1999, p. 92).

Student involvement in experiential programs have been tied to numerous career opportunities including an enhanced resume, accelerated job search time, increased compensation, improved professionalism and the ability to practically test theory (Ciot & Ciot, 2010; Grant et al., 2010; Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000). EE offers students an
employment advantage because it erodes barriers to workplace entry as it eases student access to the inner workings of a position as well as an organization. Participants (interns and other) are exposed to internal networks and receive targeted training that increases their employment desirability over external competition. EE improves academia because students become accountable as active participants in the EL process (Dewey, 1938). When students are empowered, these motivational approaches provide them with a platform to develop in-demand experience to compete nationally as well as internationally for secure jobs with worthy benefits.

The results on the investment to enhance student engagement is tri-fold; as students succeed in the classroom, the 21st-century workforce and in life (Conrad & Dunek, 2012).

The literature depicts an unstable, yet hopeful prediction for experiential program utilization. While participation in apprentice programs have declined by 16% since 2003, employers have continued their reliance on cooperative education and internship programing as fundamental recruiting tools (Kochan et al., 2012; NACE, 2013). For instance, in terms of retention, intern hiring decreased from 58.6% in 2012 to 48.4% in 2013, then showed a slight improvement to 51.2% in 2014, but continued nearly unchanged at 51.7% in 2015 (NACE, 2013; NACE, 2015a; NACE 2015b). Most recently, the 2016 intern to employee overall conversion rate is the highest it has been in 13 years, coming in at 61.9% and proving that even in times of economic instability EE is a relevant component of modern education (Efstratia, 2014; NACE, 2016b). This upsurge recognizes that “Experience continues to be one of the key attributes any entry-level professional can offer a prospective employer” (Gault et al., 2000, p.45).

The student success derived from and the resources dedicated to off-campus EE (cooperative education and internship) demand more to be done to further develop on-campus experiences (PBL), but “Higher education has lagged behind K-12 education in adopting PBL”
However, PBL expansion is anticipated because integrated field-based and classroom-based experiences greatly enhance student learning (Keeling & Hersh, 2016; McPhail, 2004; Wurdinger, 2016).

**Research Questions**

The central research question that guided this inquiry was:

- How do a university and a non-profit organization engage in partnership to collaboratively manage PBL?

The sub-questions are:

- What is the nature of the partnership?
- What purpose does an inter-organizational arrangement serve?

**Theoretical Framework**

Stakeholder Theory (ST) is comprised of many theoretical strands which acknowledges diverse management and ethical perspectives of organizations. This study specifically utilizes the typology derived from the second-order ST presented by Donaldson and Preston (1995) as a research lens in which to collect and analyze data. This taxonomy focuses on the three aspects of ST: the *normative* aspect, how firms and managers act with moral perspectives; the *instrumental* aspect, the relationship between stakeholder management and achievement; and the *descriptive* aspect, the nature of a firm or an explanation of how they behave with moral perspectives in mind (Damak-Ayadi & Pesqueux, 2005; Donaldson & Preston, 2005).

At one time an underutilized theory of business (Freeman & McVea, 2001), ST has gained popularity in industry and as a result “stakeholder-related literature is growing” (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Littau, Jujagiri, & Adlbrecht, 2010, p. 19). Still, Chapleo and Simms (2010) have claimed there is a gap in the literature regarding the “understanding of
stakeholders and the nature of stakeholder management for universities” (p. 12), as well as in other non-profit and public environments (Bryson, 2004). ST is beneficial for examining “relationships between an organization and its stakeholders and the relationships among stakeholders” (Gao, 2014, p. 11). It was selected to guide this study because it emphasizes a collaborative approach to business and represents, “the sharing of power between the organizations and the stakeholders” (Ali, 2011, p. 14). Further, this research embraces the call for action from the literature and seeks a “pragmatist perspective to the study of management” (Wicks & Freeman, 1998, p. 27). ST traditionally includes characteristics of stakeholder management and operations (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995) as well as organizational performance, and the use of mutually beneficial decision making whenever possible (Eskerod, Huemann & Savage, 2015; Freeman, 1984; Freeman, Wicks & Parmar, 2004). The theory also considers ethics, morality and CSR of the involved stakeholders (Clarkson, 1991; Phillips, Freeman & Wicks, 2003, p. 480).

Barnard (1938) first presented the general concept of stakeholders with the publication of *The Functions of the Executive*. The notion of stakeholder management gained traction in the mid-1980s in response to drastically changing business environments and the adoption of technology (Freeman & McVea, 2001). Scholars and practitioners realized the need to adapt the way businesses had been managed in order to enhance relationships and survive in the long term because understanding the dynamics of business relationships with people who have a stake in an organization is a critical aspect in determining appropriate strategies. ST was formally introduced by Freeman (1984) in *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* with its roots in business ethics, such as CSR, and corporate strategy (Eskerod et al., 2015). While somewhat common in academia, ST has been more extensive in business management practices; it is a
theory offering both prescriptive and descriptive approaches to management while also underscoring resource interdependence (Freeman & McVea, 2001; Phillips et al., 2003). ST supports the idea that organizations can act on the moral behalf of their stakeholders to achieve mutual benefits instead of only focusing on individual wealth maximization (Freeman & McVea, 2001; Phillips et al., 2003).

Freeman, the acclaimed father of the stakeholder model, credits many contributing pioneers of ST from a variety of disciplines: Robert Stuart, business planning; Eric Rhenman, business administration; Marion Doscher, research; Eric Trist, organizational development; Russell Ackoff, systems thinking; James Emshoff, business management; Richard Mason, CSR; Ian Mitroff, strategic planning; and Mary Parker Follett, organizational theory (Bentley University, 2012). These multifaceted contributions advanced ST by establishing four management research streams, including corporate planning, systems theory, CSR, and organizational theory (Freeman & McVea, 2001). ST began considering stakeholders as more than simply background entities; rather, they became essential resources that an organization depended on to conduct daily business and make critical decisions. As such, new theoretical applications were explored. For instance, Cleland (1986) was the first scholar who emphasized the criticality of stakeholders in the context of projects through his seminal work entitled *Project Stakeholder Management*.

In the mid-1990s stakeholder research also gained traction through its expansion into subfields including, corporate governance, performance and strategic management (Freeman & McVea, 2001). The theory was further enhanced with its applications extending beyond owners and suppliers to larger stakeholder groups such as the public and community (Eskerod et al., 2015). Even at this point in its evolution, however, ST and its derivatives were relatively
simplistic in calling for additional advancements to assess the complexities of modern business. In response, Donaldson and Preston (1995) extended ST with a journal publication entitled *The Stakeholder Theory of Corporation: Concepts, Evidence, and Implications*. The publication presented the three interconnected and closely related analytical categories including, normative, instrumental and descriptive aspects. The normative aspect of ST examines corporate goodwill and stakeholder democracy (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Garcia-Castro & Ariño, 2008). It considers “how the world ought to be” (Egels-Zandén & Sandberg, 2010, p. 37) by investigating the commitment, loyalty, trust and alignment of shared objectives among stakeholders and emphasizing why stakeholders consider the needs of other stakeholders and how they go about satisfying them (Eskerod et al., 2015; Garcia-Castro & Ariño, 2008; Freeman & McVea, 2001). The normative aspect also identifies specifics for enhancing project success across both temporary and more permanent stakeholder groups (Eskerod et al., 2015).

Contrarily, the instrumental aspect of ST is economic in nature, focusing on value procurement and resource distribution (Garcia-Castro & Ariño, 2008) and examines “the connections, and lack of connections between stakeholder management and the achievement of traditional corporate objectives (e.g. profitability, growth)” (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p. 71). The instrumental aspect explains those connections by exploring the cause and effect (Damak-Ayadi & Pesqueux, 2005; Egels-Zandén & Sandberg, 2010) while also considering “how the connections between certain things really work, or are, in the world” (Egels-Zandén & Sandberg, p. 37, 2010). This particular aspect can “explain and guide the structure of operations” (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p. 70). While conventional ST focuses on relationships between an organization and its stakeholders, organization-centric analytical theories that fall under the instrumental approach place corporations in a central position with direct links to its stakeholders.
Savage, Bunn, Gray, Xiao, Wang, Wilson, and Williams (2010) have suggested that the instrumental aspect of ST can be used to examine inter-organizational collaborations among multiple stakeholders.

The descriptive aspect of ST is from the corporation’s standpoint (Buonora, 2016). It “illustrates the intrinsic strategic environment of an organization as portrayed through its social, political and ethical dimensions” (Bornsen, Ostrom-Blonigen, & Plowman, 2008, p. 11) and explains corporate characteristics, as well as organizational decision making (management behavior) and its influences (Ali, 2011; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman & McVea, 2001). This aspect describes the observable interaction between organizations and their stakeholders, dealing “with issues concerning how the world is” (Egels-Zandén & Sandberg, 2010, p. 37).

As organization and strategic partnership complexities evolved, so has ST. While it is more common for project stakeholder management to be linked to business analysis and change management, it is only in the last few years that the attributes of stakeholder management and ST have gained a resurgence in the formal discussion found in project management literature (Worsley, 2016). As of late, variations of ST have resurfaced in the literature, including conversations regarding inter-organizational collaborations resulting from the needs of temporary and permanent project stakeholders (Eskerod et al., 2015; Karlsen, 2002; Worsley, 2016). To illustrate, Savage et al., (2010) looked at multi-sector, inter-organizational collaborations, in addition to the nature of stakeholder relationships in terms of social partnerships, and suggested links to both descriptive and instrumental stakeholder approaches, while Eskerod et al., (2015) claimed that the analysis of project stakeholders is related to instrumental as well as normative approaches. It has been argued that ST is rooted by a normative core which then delineates into one of the other aspects more intensely than the other (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).
Most recently, Strand and Freeman (2015) revealed a discrepancy with the origination of the term *stakeholder* due to publication confusion. That is, although it was originally thought to have been coined by Marion Doscher in 1963 as a modification to the terms shareholder and constituent, it was later found to have been defined by Eric Rhenman in a Swedish manuscript that was published in 1964. It was translated to English and printed in the United States in 1968 (Ali, 2011; Bentley University, 2012). Prior to this discovery, it was thought that the American publication was an original rather than a translated version, so in retrospect the timeline of the manuscript actually credits Rhenman with the term as well as the inspiration for stakeholder management theory (Eskerod et al., 2015).

**Criticism.** The term *stakeholder* has caused confusion within the literature not only due to issues regarding its origination, but also because it has been defined and re-defined several times in an attempt to distinguish its legitimacy. Unfortunately, this lack of clarity has diluted its understanding, and the stakeholder, shareholder, and stockholder debate continues (Crane & Ruebottom, 2011; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Friedman & Miles, 2002). However, considering the definitions as a guide instead of as an exact standard reveals several commonalities and overlapping features between them. In most cases, they involve associations between someone (a person, persons or an entity) and some type of reception or contribution (or both) resulting from an activity, action or consequence, with the potential to add or detract value from a firm. For example, Freeman (1984) said a stakeholder is “any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization’s objectives” (p. 46) and Carroll (1991) specified this by stating that a stakeholder is “groups or persons who have a stake, a claim, or an interest in the operations and decisions of the firm” (p. 43). Worsley (2016) has offered an inclusive version of the two above-mentioned definitions, suggesting that a stakeholder is “an
individual, group, or organization who may affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision, activity or outcome” (p. 11).

To further complicate the definition of a stakeholder, the actual role of stakeholder - primary, secondary and other - fluctuates based on the economic, social, and environmental conditions at the time and can also be determined by the type or duration of a project (Worsley, 2016). The priority of partnerships or shareholder value maximization is another criticism of ST (Ali, 2011). While some argue for an even distribution of benefits across stakeholders, others support varying levels of entitlement based on business needs as well as future implications (Jensen, 2002). Buonora (2016) raised the question “Why should all participant[s] needs be treated equally when some stakeholders have more of a stake in the final outcome of decisions than others?” (p. 47). In agreement, Worsley (2016) has asserted that it is impossible to consider everyone as a stakeholder due to resource limitations. The level of engagement must be strategized appropriately through stakeholder segmentation to distribute and sustain resources appropriately to achieve organizational goals. Perhaps this is why stakeholders can be prioritized under different dimensions according to their perceived power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997).

The reality of integrative stakeholder strategies requires continuous input and long-term established alliances (Daud et al., 2011). In order to form strong partnerships across stakeholder groups, trust, commitment and team cohesion must be considered because there are many process challenges which require effective communication and problem solving strategies that satisfy the entire team. Cultural gaps or differences in values and behaviors pose the greatest challenge to cohesive partnerships between HEI and stakeholders (Lapan et al., 2002). They are denoted as a “significant impediment to successful collaborations” (Berman, 2008, p. 165). Each
level of a systematic structure such as an organization, a department or a team differs culturally as well as operationally, posing challenges in managing the partnerships between them. Embracing change and tolerating diverse perceptions of those involved can be a substantial difficulty, but open-mindedness of differing views can increase the alignment of stakeholders (Dixon & Einhorn, 2014; Jeffrey, 2009). Although cultural gaps are more typical between organizations, they are also present within institutions; for example, “Faculty culture can complement or clash with administrative culture” (Manning, 2013, p. 1108) depending upon their philosophy of education and service.

Tensions in higher education environments exacerbate challenges, making it difficult to transform programs and services. Manning (2013) discussed these various pressures by examining the following three dichotomies: the issues of academic freedom, “interdependence versus independence”; the struggle of organizational form, “flexibility versus structure”; and the disconnect between productivity approaches, “competitive versus collaborative” (p. 259). Mumby (2013) has suggested that leaders construct a shared identity among groups, and in doing so, “members are more likely to share a single vision of beliefs and values” (p.138), which enriches consistent decision making. Recognizing and diffusing potential breakdowns will enhance the success of organizations. An important facet of developing strong strategic partnerships is for cross-functional decision makers to examine compatibility of the stakeholder groups. Comparing mission statements, vision, motivations, values, objectives, success factors, outcomes, finances, resources, skills, processes and culture aids in streamlining cohesion to safeguard integration and long term quality of partnerships (Daud et al., 2011; Meister, 2003). Stakeholders should be written into the very mission and operations of day-to-day business (Freeman & McVea, 2001). All businesses and organizations strive to be successful, improve
stability and seek value-driven ways to enhance resource development. Understanding interactions from a cultural and values-based viewpoint enhances workplace production; it creates “new ways to motivate employees, reinvigorate corporate productivity, and meet the challenges of a global economy” (Mumby, 2013, p. 137).

Along critical lines is the opinion that stakeholder management is a far-reaching and limited approach to commerce, with some skeptics classifying it as anti-capitalist because ST challenges the idea that the sole purpose of a business is profit maximization (Freeman & McVea, 2001). To the contrary, ST may be rooted in ethics and be values-based, but it does not discount the importance of economic gains. Though the stakeholder approach might not work for all organizations, it has applicability beyond socially motivated companies and has become quite viable for organizations of all types, sizes and missions (Carroll, 2015; Freeman & McVea, 2001). The top priority of higher education has always been to educate students, but with for-profit HEI on the rise, this has the potential to change. Individual institutions may or may not be community-conscious, but in most cases colleges and universities are constructed with a moral foundation lending themselves nicely to ST. Although partnerships have their share of trials, uniting academia and industry or academia and the community considerably benefits workers, employers, and local citizens while simultaneously providing a reasonable solution for equipping students with practical education (Kochan et al., 2012; Holle, 2012).

**Key Terminology**

**Community Engagement:** The result of “applying institutional resources (e.g., knowledge and expertise of students, faculty and staff, political position, buildings and land) to address and solve challenges facing communities through collaboration with these communities” (Gelmon, Seifer, Kauper-Brown, & Mikkelsen, 2005, p. 1; Thompson & Jesiek, 2011).
**Experiential Education (EE):** A cross-disciplined “philosophy of education” (Itin, 1999, p. 91), by which a participant acknowledges personal and professional growth as a result of knowledge and skill attainment through direct experience (Association for Experiential Education, n.d.). EE encompasses many deviations, including project-based learning, cooperative education and internship (Association for Experiential Education, n.d.).

**Experiential Learning (EL):** A theory in alignment with the philosophy of EE. EL is individually-centered learning gained through doing, observing, reflecting, and making meaning of individual experiences. Defined as “the change in an individual that results from reflection on a direct experience and results in new abstractions and applications” (Itin, 1999, p. 92).

**Global Citizenship:** The direct “engagement in global issues or with different cultures in a local setting” (Green, 2012, p. 124). It “entails an awareness of the interdependence of individuals and systems and a sense of responsibility that follows from it” (Green, 2012, p. 125).

**Project-based Learning (PBL):** An active, inquiry-based learning approach and instructional methodology centered around student collaboration “to plan, develop and assess a project that has a practical application” (Marquez-Lepe & Jimenez-Rodrigo, 2014, p. 78).

**Stakeholder:** An individual, group or organization, or anyone or anything, with a stake in the outcome of an objective, initiative, project, or program.

**Stakeholder Engagement (SE):** A two-way approach “premised on the notion that ‘those groups who can affect or are affected by the achievements of an organisation’s purpose’ should be given the opportunity to comment and input into the development of decisions that affect them” (Jeffrey, 2009, p. 8).

**Stakeholder Theory (ST):** A theory comprised of many strands which acknowledges the diverse management and ethical perspectives of organizations. ST supports the idea that organizations can act on the moral behalf of their stakeholders to achieve mutual benefits instead of only focusing on individual wealth maximization (Freeman & McVea, 2001; Phillips et al., 2003).

**Strategic Partnerships:** The relationships between two or more entities (individuals, groups, or organizations) as a result of a shared purpose (Kochan et al., 2012; Holle, 2012).
Summary

Chapter 1 discussed the purpose of this research, which is to understand the long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization by describing the interactions and influences of stakeholder engagement. It articulated the research questions and explained the relevance of ST and how it was used as a theoretical framework to guide this research. The study is relevant because it details best practices that are mutually beneficial for a variety of stakeholders, and this awareness is critical for improving the current and future state of education, the workforce, as well as the community.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature focusing on the trajectory and program management of PBL while also providing an overview of strategic partnerships further describing the context of the research topic. Chapter 3 explains the qualitative research design elected in this study, including how case study methodology was used to collect and analyze data in order to answer the research questions, as well as how the research was conducted in an ethical and trustworthy manner. Chapter 4 details the case background and includes the inter-organizational context and timeline of the collaboration between the two research sites. It also reports the emergent themes derived from a multi-step data collection and analysis process. Chapter 5 concludes the study by discussing the key findings in great depth, explaining how the research questions, theoretical framework and literature informed the researcher’s interpretation of those findings. Further, it provides the implications for theory, implications for practice, and the implications for research, as well as the limitations and a final conclusion of the overall study.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Chapter 2 reviews literature from multiple, inter-related disciplines to support the main concepts of this study. It also constructs the grounds for this research by providing a literary foundation for project-based learning (PBL), while honing in on the central focus of strategic partnerships and stakeholder engagement.

Experiential Education Through Project-based Learning

Although the idea of learning through experience has been around since the Medieval Ages, it was not until the late 19th century that the assimilation of theory and classroom practice became philosophically integrated (Donahue, 2001). The shift to industrialization and urbanization, as well as the influx of immigrants to the United States of America evoked a need for vocational guidance to manage the transition of people from school and work (Herr, 2001). As such, new skills were required by workers in order to fulfill employment demands and public schools were scrutinized as supporters spoke out in favor of vocational and industrial education to complement traditional text book education (Herr, 2001). The non-traditional approach of merging the two distinct areas of school and work made it unclear as to which party was designated as responsible for practical training, education institutions or employers. This debate continues even in modern times, yet nowadays experiential programs are vast and directly support field-based and curriculum-based learning.

Experiential education (EE) programs connect theory with practice to assist with the student transition from school to work (Schwartz, n. d). Activities that embody elements of learning through doing via observing, reflecting, and meaning making out of individual experiences are essential for proper student development (Lewis & Williams, 1994). The variety of program choices allow stakeholders to self-select the best concept based on alignment,
business demands and organizational needs (bRIdge, 2013). Typically, programs are chosen by higher education institutions (HEI) based on their alignment with curricular outcomes and assessment depending upon major, industry, resources and student profile. Experiential learning (EL) is a recognized avenue in acquainting students with professional practice prior to graduation, but most importantly, it is a chance for students to integrate “course work with real-world applications and blending theory with practical application” (White, 2012, p. 25). These opportunities allow students to test knowledge and skills in addition to improve upon any deficiencies prior to officially entering the world of work.

Structured EE programs and EL activities permit students to construct meaning from experiences. Students work with field professionals to gain industry exposure aiding in the selection of suitable career paths (Cook et al., 2004). They become the “primary beneficiaries” (bRIdge, 2013, p. 3) of experiences and are at the forefront of responsibility as it relates to the selection, engagement, and attainment of the benefits resulting from EE. What an individual “has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation [EL] becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow [employment]” (Dewey, 1938, p. 44). Experiential-based models complement traditional coursework and lead to employment prospects as students gain experience by directly applying knowledge in a practical setting. John Dewey (1938), the acclaimed modern father of EE, emphasized:

Experiential education is a holistic philosophy, where carefully chosen experiences supported by reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis, are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for the results, through actively posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, constructing meaning, and integrating previously
developed knowledge. Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, politically, spiritually, and physically in an uncertain environment where the learner may experience success, failure, adventure, and risk taking. (as cited in Itin, 1999, p. 93)

Dewey has made a considerable impact on EE through his written works and exhaustive studies including two seminal publications: Democracy and Education in 1916 and Experience and Education in 1938 (Donahue, 2001). As an academic philosopher and educational reformist, Dewey supported the progressive education movement, thus modifying what he felt was lacking in traditional teaching approaches. He urged the transition from passive learning to active and meaningful learning. Through his advocacy of pragmatism, he was passionate about increasing student motivation in the classroom and supported the implementation of relevant curriculum to enhance individual learning.

The literature has suggested that the education system starting in kindergarten throughout doctoral-level programs are ineffective because many teaching strategies lack an experiential focus (Itin, 1999). EE changes the educational landscape, influencing students as early as grade school and persisting throughout post-secondary education. In elementary school, EE could take the form of a teacher inviting a professional into the classroom as a guest speaker for Career Day, to discuss his or her job responsibilities and qualifications to educate students on the range of career possibilities. In middle school, engagement is an exploratory means to motivate students about future job opportunities as they begin to align general interests with potential career paths. During high school, career development talks continue and students are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities to further develop relevant skills for college and beyond (Lapan et al., 2002; Maida, 2011). This model is intensified in technical vocational high schools with hands-on curriculum in a myriad of content areas such as architecture, automotive technology,
carpentry, community health, cosmetology, culinary arts, fashion design, information technology, plumbing and welding. To demonstrate, The Culinary Arts Academy at Simeon Career Technical Academy has a strong affiliation with ProStart, an industry-supported technical education program that blends classroom knowledge with industry experience (ProStart, 2015). This experiential program allows enrolled high school students to complete requirements by working part-time jobs, volunteering, or working on campus within their related industry. Upon completion of the extensive program, students receive a nationally recognized certificate providing accessibility to apply for trade scholarships, as well as advanced college credit.

Introductory career programming throughout the education continuum builds a foundation for refining potential career direction for students (Cook et al., 2004). Short term, entry-level experiences as part of post-secondary education pave the way for satisfied students to continue on a chosen career path of enhancing industry knowledge, while dissatisfied students have the ability to change direction prior to graduation (Davidson et al., 2010). Early industry exposure saves time, money and resources on behalf of students who feel pressure to make long-term career decisions with limited industry acquaintance. Perhaps this suggests why there has been a rise in participation of a gap year among students. Research has shown that aside from adventure, independence, altruism and global exploration, students who delayed the start of college by one year eased the tensions of making immediate determinations of academic study and career choice after high school (O’Shea, 2013). However, curriculum-based experiences are more feasible and they contribute to effective career planning prior to enrollment in higher education as well as throughout a student’s college career.
Collegiate level EE consists of institutions employing custom approaches embodying a mix of required or optional, or both required and optional programing (elective credits). For some institutions the philosophy of EE has been embedded in their curriculum from the beginning, whereas others have amended their curriculum based on national and global competition in recent years following the Great Recession. Of the various EE and EL programs, cooperative education and internship have shown a steady increase in popularity, as they are the most frequently referred to terminology in the literature describing integrated academic and field experiences for students. To differentiate cooperative education and internship, the terms are defined below along with relevant examples:

Cooperative education is a structured method of combining classroom-based education with practical work experience. A cooperative education experience provides academic credit for structured job experience. Co-op experiences are either full-time (40 hours per week) alternating periods (semester, quarter) of work and school or part-time (20 hours per week) combining work and school during the same time period. Co-op experiences are paid, supervised by a professional who has followed the same career path of the student and students complete more than one assignment (2 or more) with progressive levels of responsibility. (Cooperative Education & Internship Association, n.d., para.12)

Northeastern University (NEU) in Boston, Massachusetts has been recognized as a co-op leader since 1909. The institution allows students at least 2 experiences throughout a 4-year degree program and 3 experiences in the 5-year degree program (Mitchell, 2014; Scott, 2014; Smollins, 1999). As a result, 50% of recent graduates received a job offer from a previous co-op employer, and 89% are working in positions directly related to their major (Northeastern University, 2015). The Princeton Review ranked NEU among the top 4 HEI in the United States with the *Best*
Career Services consecutively over the past 7 years, taking first place in 2015 (Scott, 2014).

Internship can be part-time or full-time, paid or unpaid, and have structured and assessed field experiences. Varying in length, programs can consist of a wide range of academic disciplines and organizational settings to promote hands-on student learning (bRIdge, 2013; Gault et al., 2000; NACE, 2016b). More explicitly,

An internship is an experience involving students working in their expected career field, either during a semester or over the summer. Internships may be paid or unpaid and may or may not carry academic credit. Internships are typically one time experiences. Internships are typically connected to an academic program with course requirements designed and monitored by faculty. Internships generally have related learning outcomes and academic assignments required. (Cooperative Education & Internship Association, n.d, para.13)

Over 90% of undergraduate students at Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts participate in at least 1 internship during their degree program and are highly encouraged to participate in additional internships, service-learning, study abroad and corporate partnerships. With a 95% employment rate within 6 months’ post-graduation, the University ranked number 4 by The Princeton Review for Best Career Services (Loudenback, 2016). The U.S. News & World Report (2015) rated the University number 12 out of 25 for The Best Schools for Internships. The supportive statistics from NEU’s cooperative education and Bentley University’s internship program indicate the importance of HEI consideration of EE inclusion to improve knowledge attainment and learning among students. In addition, these exemplars reiterate that quality preparation increases the employability of graduates.
Dewey identified several criteria to distinguish between standard learning and what is now understood to be EL. He developed three principles to determine educative value: the principle of interaction, an explanation of the dynamic between external conditions and internal factors; the principle of continuity, the ability of transformation, to build upon learning and connect past experiences to future experiences; and the principle of reflection, the process of the personal examination of primary experiences that lead to secondary learning experiences and growth (Donahue, 2001). The groundwork for David A. Kolb’s EL Theory was established by Dewey’s research as well as other prominent 20th-century learning and human development scholars, including Kurt Lewin, social psychology: group dynamics; Jean Piaget, cognitive development: constructivism; William James, psychology: associationism; Carl Jung, analytical psychology: personality; Paulo Freire, educator and critical pedagogy philosopher: banking model of education; Carl Rogers, humanistic psychology: learner-centered teaching (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001; Kolb & Kolb, 2008).

EL theory is a holistic learning model highlighting knowledge derived from experience often associated with structured and assessed components of academic as well as work-integrated learning (Garraway, Volbrecht, Wicht & Ximba, 2011; Kolb et al., 2001). Further, it is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Kolb’s Learning Cycle consists of a required four-step process in order to meet the objectives of the theory: (1) concrete experience; (2) observation and reflection; (3) abstract conceptualization; and (4) active experimentation (Kolb et al., 2001). In addition to defining EL theory and detailing its associated learning cycle, which have greatly extended the literature, Kolb was credited with developing a multi-linear model of adult development. He has also produced
multiple works including the well-known learning styles inventory, which suggests that people fall within one of four preferences: diverging, assimilating, converging, or accommodating (Kolb & Kolb, 2008; Kolb et al., 2001).

**Project-based learning.** There are many ways in which EE and EL are put into practice, including the aforementioned concepts of cooperative education and internship. Additional approaches in philosophical alignment with these concepts are PBL and problem-based learning. Much of the literature uses these two terms interchangeably, as they are both inquiry-based with parallel learning outcomes (Kolodner, Camp, Crismond, Fasse, Gray, Holbrook, Puntambekar & Ryan, 2003). However, the major difference is that PBL directs inquiry toward creation or product development in response to a challenging question whereas problem-based learning uses knowledge application in response to an open-ended issue, concern or problem of practice (Cho & Brown, 2013; Dunlap, 2005; Lee et al., 2014; Martelli, & Watson, 2016). Oftentimes the two concepts are not uniquely distinguished and have been recognized as subsets of each other due to their close resemblance (Cho & Brown, 2013; English & Kitsantas, 2013). Still, there are minor variations as well as differences in the historical roots between them, later colliding through their shared support of the progressive education movement (Delisle, 1997; English & Kitsantas, 2013; Kolodner et al., 2003, Lee et al., 2014). This study continues with the same approach of collectively grouping both concepts, yet it focuses on the historical trajectory of PBL as it can also have a problem-based orientation.

DeFillippi (2001) has claimed that PBL is “the theory and practice of promoting individual and collective learning through projects” (p. 5). It is a technique that was constructed from a historical foundation built over a century ago with theoretical underpinnings linked to Dewey. In 1921, PBL Pioneer William Heard Kilpatrick cultivated many Deweyan philosophies
such as progressive education, EE and EL to develop the project method; after its initial
development, PBL was enhanced with the addition of reflection and active inquiry, which was
later added by Dewey and Kolb (Helle, Tynjälä & Olkinuora, 2006).

Although PBL is not a new approach, it is less common than cooperative education and
internship. It is emerging as an experiential supplement in response to the demands of the 21st-
century workplace because it boosts individual knowledge production while also preparing
students with relevant skills (Gallagher, 2017; Golding, 2011; Larmer, Mergendoller & Boss,
2015; Lee, et al., 2014; Rogers, 2014). PBL is a progressive, instructional, and transformative
learning method that encompasses student-centered pedagogies (Morgan, 1983; Rogers, 2014;
Schwartz, n.d.). PBL is rooted in constructionism, “The constructivist perspective suggests that
learning is a process of interpreting and organizing [organizing] information and experiences into
meaningful units, transforming old conceptions and constructing new ones” (Golding, 2011, p. 468).
For example, through PBL students are able to make use of existing education and
experience by building on what is known to enhance their knowledge. To further explain,

Students who are seriously engaged in higher learning encounter new material-
knowledge, perspectives, points of view, creations, performances, events, and activities.
As they continue to make connections between past knowledge and experience and new
learning, the likelihood that the new learning will make sense, stick and be available for
later problem solving increases. (Keeling & Hersh, 2016, p. 7)
PBL moves away from conventional teacher-focused approaches extending beyond
contextualized learning by integrating students with interactive problem solving through
facilitated, purposeful projects (Efstratia, 2014; Helle et al., 2006; Lewis & Williams, 1994).
PBL positions questions or problems at the front-end of learning whereas conventional methods
situate them at the end of a module or lesson plan. It is through PBL that “students learn how to apply knowledge to the real world, and use it to solve problems, answer complex questions, and create high-quality products” (Buck Institute for Education, 2015, p. 4). PBL is an important approach assisting students with developing 21st-century competencies (Buck Institute for Education, n.d.-b; Cho & Brown, 2013) because:

The complex problems in PBL typically place a diverse range of students on a relatively equal playing field with respect to skills and knowledge, alleviating task-orientation issues that can disadvantage some students. This approach can support all students’ beliefs of usefulness and interest by situating technical content within issues of social, personal, and professional relevance. The reflective components of PBL contribute to higher levels of individual interest by helping students explicitly articulate their growing understanding of the work that professionals in their field do. Finally, PBL environments contribute to students’ sense of caring as facilitators provide guided mentoring and students learn to depend on one another for learning. (Jones, Epler, Mokri, Bryant, & Paretti, 2013, p. 40)

PBL provides an EE option where faculty guide students through industry or community relevant learning experiences. For instance, Worcester Polytechnic Institute located in Worcester, Massachusetts was founded upon the concept of uniting theory with practice. The Institute predominantly utilizes PBL as a basis for its robust engineering and science focused curriculum (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, n.d.-a). First-year students are involved in a newly created foundations program called Great Problems Seminars, which acclimates new students to project-based methodology and university-level research (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 2009). The Institute also requires two research-driven PBL opportunities, Interactive Qualifying Project and
Major Qualifying Project, to currently enrolled undergraduate college students during their junior and senior year. The Interactive Qualifying Project is motivated by the needs of local, national and international communities encouraging socially responsible citizenship. This specific on-site or off-site junior-year project is faculty led, but not directly connected to a course or distinct major (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 2009).

Projects involve faculty and students working with sponsor organizations at over 40 locations in 25 different countries solving problems “related to energy, environment, sustainable development, education, cultural preservation, and technology policy” (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, n.d.-b, para. 4). The Major Qualifying Project is a field-relevant, major-intensive, senior capstone course managed by faculty, mentors and external sponsors (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, n.d.-c). The U.S News & World Report (2016) of America’s Best Colleges ranked Worcester Polytechnic Institute at number 57 out of 100. Previously in 2010, the Institute was designated under Programs to look for stressing their considerable efforts in undergraduate research and creative projects referred to as “outstanding examples of academic programs that are commonly linked to student success” (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 2009, para. 1).

PBL approaches enhance content retention as well as the development of transferable skills, while also reinforcing technical ability, making them extremely effective in preparing students for college, career and life (Larmer et al., 2015). Students “acquire skills in the problem-solving process as well as the content of the course or unit in which the problem [or project question] is situated” (Henry, Tawfik, Jonassen, Winholtz & Khanna, 2012, p. 45). The observations students make while participating in PBL can inform them of potential career direction, realistic timetables for growth, as well as qualifications necessary for advancement within a specified career path (Jackson & Sirianni, 2009). Simulated industry experience permits
students to choose a career that aligns well with preferences and interests based on direct exposure instead of assumptions.

Student participation and active contribution is pivotal in PBL, and several studies have been conducted regarding the impact of self-efficacy and self-regulation of learning (English & Kitsantas, 2013; Larmer et al., 2015). When students are engrossed in projects with real clients, they work harder to develop creative solutions which further hone marketable skills and increases motivation (Grant et al., 2010; Smith & Gibson, 2016). Students gain a sense of accomplishment through projects, thereby enhancing confidence in their abilities which can be capitalized upon during job interviews (Jacobson, 2001; Rogers, 2014). PBL has positive future effects as well; when students, interns or alumni perform well, HEI gain credibility and consequently the associated relationships between stakeholders strengthen (Cook et al., 2004).

The bulk of PBL research has focused on K-12 education (Donahue, 2001; Lee et al., 2014); assessment (Schwartz, n.d; Qualters, 2010); student outcomes; student experiences (Lewis, 2015; Donahue, 2001); or faculty implementation successes and challenges (Helle et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2014). A majority of EE and EL literature refers to off-campus cooperative education and internship, leaving the complexities of PBL program management understudied as Gallagher (2017) has pointed out:

There is no shortage of prognostications about the future of higher education. Higher education’s future—and the future of talent acquisition strategies that rely on it—arguably hinges on the ways that employers and higher education institutions interact and collaborate to meet their shared interests, particularly with respect to how academic credentials operate in the job market. (Gallagher, 2017, para. 3)
These issues present the need for understanding the dynamics of “process oriented methodologies” (Donahue, 2001, p. 13) to enhance strategic partnerships allowing stakeholders to fully reap rewards of collaboration.

**Challenges.** Drawbacks of experiential programs are somewhat limited in the literature which is a plausible explanation for the upsurge in participation across many levels and disciplines within education, but challenges still exist. Cunningham (2007) has warned against the integration of EE due to the potential for risk aversion, explaining that negative student experiences leave lasting impressions, thus fueling limitative thinking that hinders students’ abilities to venture outside of their comfort zone to try new things. However, regardless of student outcomes, positive and negative experiences alike equate to valuable life lessons and relevant professional development (Westerberg & Wickersham, 2011).

Administrators, faculty, industry, community and government professionals argue the need for EE to complement traditional education, and numerous studies have shown that students who have the ability to market a balance of theoretical and practical skills will have an advantage in the job market. Improving teaching approaches and student experiences within the classroom has been a continuous goal for educators seeking to provide students with innovative and engaging education that directly supports career goals and civic engagement (Ponder, Veldt, & Lewis-Ferrell, 2011). Still, research focused on improving teaching modalities and facilitation processes limited to the classroom could under represent off-site EE, thereby devaluing field experiences (Gault et al., 2000). Eyler (1992) stated that faculty tend to be concerned with “whether the educational opportunity costs are offset by what is learned in the field” (p. 41), just as they question how students will put classroom theory into practice through EE programs. Many stakeholders contemplate the influence of classroom theory in practice, propelling the
need for cohesive partnership, planning and assessment (Qualters, 2010).

Bates (1999) has alluded to the idea that tighter connections between education and business accentuate elements of training over education. Too much emphasis on career-focused education in the curriculum could force students’ career options to be limited and reduce the adaptableness that is necessary in such an ever-changing globalized market. On the other hand, solitary emphasis on theory in the curriculum “appears insufficient to meet employers’ and professionals’ expectations of the education system” (Romenti, Invernizzi, & Biraghi, 2012, p. 211), coming across as a lack of focus, limiting relevant skill sets necessary for job seeking graduates. A well-rounded and interdisciplinary approach to education seems ideal, because it allows students to develop transferable skills or “renewable competencies” (Millar, 2013, para. 11) instead of narrow skills sets which promote adaptability.

Other concerns with EE is that it reinforces the presumption that the sole purpose of higher education is to produce a workforce, but that stance minimizes the importance of students’ social and cognitive growth. There is more to education than the fact that it can lead to occupational prosperity; it should not only enhance job prospects, but equally support personal and economic opportunity as well (Keeling & Hersh, 2016; Maida, 2011; Millar, 2013; Veblen, 1918). Another assumption is that a person must attend college in order to have a thriving career; however, this narrowed way of thinking and dependence on institutions has been challenged by the deschooling movement which is a social and political push to return power and shared knowledge back to the community (Jelinek, 2012).

The balance of on-campus and off-campus experiences is vitally important, as a combination approach enhances both practical and theoretical education for students with mutual
appeal to academia as well as industry (Smith & Gibson, 2016). John A. Yena, Chief Executive Officer and President of JWU from 1989-2004, claimed,

Higher education has a continuum. At one end, purely vocational schools who give job skills to graduates: very little education for life. The other end is the academy, which is all education for life. Johnson & Wales has been and continues to be in the sweet spot, which is somewhere in the middle. (Brouillard, 2013, p. 23)

PBL is an ideal approach blending the positive aspects of each dichotomy, thereby better preparing graduates with increased learning and transferable skills that are useful in a wide range of personal and professional possibilities (Maida, 2011).

According to the literature, PBL is gaining popularity for good reason, yet its rapid development is generating concern regarding quality assurance (Buck Institute for Education, 2015; Larmer et al., 2015). While there appears to be conflicting ideas of what constitutes true PBL, the literature depicts clear distinctions between project work versus PBL (Cho & Brown, 2013; Mayer, 2012). Project work implies short-term context-specific participation where the student applies what he or she has learned. PBL extends beyond this concept, promoting a deep level of critical thinking and thereby increasing transferable skills that are more useful in the longer-term career goals of students (Jones et al., 2013; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010). PBL advances the basic project approach, in which students learn context and application through the discovery process of responding directly to an “authentic, contextualized problem” (Dunlap, 2005, p. 65) or question. Projects are an avenue by which the learning process is guided and improved (Tamim & Grant, 2013).

Though student confusion with course structure, unclear critiques (writing and format versus problem solving and solutions) and dysfunctional group dynamics persevere; all are
aspects that can be reasonably controlled with proper management across stakeholder groups (Coco, Truong & Kaupins, 2013; Henry et al., 2012). PBL can look to be unstructured because of its open-ended style. Conversely, PBL can be process-driven as long as there are elements of flexibility to combat expected uncertainty. Faculty are oftentimes tentative about what constitutes quality student experiences because there is a wide range of variation in the program requirements, expectations and outcomes across HEI, disciplines and even courses.

PBL can be managed in many ways depending on the unique situation of a particular academic institution. To alleviate angst for users, Buck Institute for Education, a non-profit organization with the prime focus of supporting stakeholders with professional development of high-quality project-based teaching practices, has suggested a Gold Standard PBL model which outlines seven steps: (1) design & plan; (2) align to standards; (3) build the culture; (4) manage activities; (5) scaffold student learning; (6) assess student learning; and (7) engage & coach (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015).

**Strategic Partnerships**

A strategic partnership is defined as the relationship between two or more entities (individuals, groups, or organizations) as a result of a shared purpose (Kochan et al., 2012; Holle, 2012). Strategic “partnerships outside the educational system with state agencies, legislators, employers, and economic development alliances [are] especially critical” (Holle, 2012, p. 20) and is the result of a partnering mentality where the well-being of all parties are deliberated (Freeman & McVea, 2001). This section presents PBL variations and typical stakeholder engagement that was gleaned from the literature. These examples are not all-inclusive, but they do offer a glimpse of the partnership and program types between HEI and pertinent stakeholder groups.
**Higher education and industry partnerships.** HEI are those predominantly tasked with producing employable graduates, but employers have been the most accountable for workforce training and education (Daud et al., 2011; Kochan et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Commerce et al., 1999). However, HEI tends to educate content knowledge that has versatile application, whereas employers are more likely to train “company-specific, non-transferable skills” (U.S. Department of Commerce et al., 1999, p. 21) in reaction to the potentially wasted effort and financial investment in the case of employee turnover. PBL has the opportunity to teach both transferable and technical skills. HEI and industry have mutual potential to influence curriculum by structuring experiential programs that qualify students for greater success following graduation. The literature encourages a closer look at outdated relationships between overlapping but distinct areas of higher education and industry, further clarifying the need for revised tactics of the fundamental interlacement of responsibility (Harvey, 2000).

For many organizations, “internships and co-operative education programs are an essential component of college recruiting programs” (NACE, 2013, p. 3). An industry recruiter named Phillips, representing Walt Disney World, reaffirmed that relationships with HEI and students are the most important aspect in hiring (Giordani, 2012). College relations programs not only develop the talent pipeline, but also arm businesses in sustaining a competitive edge for future success (Giordani, 2012). Engaged stakeholders have an opportunity through collaboration to outline practical features of partnership that work in favor of students’ academic and career preparation. Both campus-based and field-based experiences prepare students to enter the workforce with a reduced learning curve because they are exposed to realistic situations that develop necessary skill sets to perform in their chosen fields.
The headway resulting from the popularity of EE creates momentum for PBL as an additional on-campus approach that has the likelihood to be equally as effective with employers. Grant et al. (2010) conducted a study that documented strategic partnerships between three learning environments: a classroom, a business, and a professional organization. The objective of this project was to solve business problems reinforcing technical, communication, presentation, teamwork, and project management skills (Grant et al., 2010). Stakeholder integration provided the chance for students to develop practical knowledge throughout multiple capstone courses which were co-developed by faculty and employers. The experiment enhanced the curriculum by maximizing traditional classroom theory linked to the increase in student employability. This example represents the collaborative effectiveness between multiple stakeholder groups who are passionate about student instruction as well as career outcomes. However, as discussed previously, it takes time and energy to form successful partnerships.

To gain clearer insight of employer expectations of graduate attributes such as knowledge, skills, abilities and personality, Daud et al. (2011) conducted a two-part study on enhancing university curricula. The themes that emerged from a focus group were used to create a questionnaire that was then distributed personally to the managers of all the companies in industries that employed business graduates from the studied university. The choice to include both qualitative and quantitative methods allowed deeper inspection of the gap between the perceptions as well as expectations of managers towards graduates’ abilities and their actual performance. The study concluded that curricula should be “relevant to the needs of the market and industry” (Daud et al., 2011, p. 545).

Alternatively, the ability for employers to understand newcomer expectations and adjustment strategies will allow HEI and industry to make effective adjustments to streamline
program operations. Like education and training, organizational socialization is also a shared responsibility between HEI, industry, and students. Such optimization would enhance programming by modifying outcomes aimed at successful employment of students both upon graduation as well as throughout their career progression.

Holle (2012) detailed experiences related to collaborative program development at Autry Technology Center in Enid, Oklahoma. The article outlined significant partnerships while it discussed the progression of building deeper and more meaningful industry connections. The most relevant experiment identified an example of a professional level internship as means to collect and report quality driven company data. Industry relationships were initiated by academic year employed faculty who opted to participate in a month long professional development immersion program titled *The 11-month contract*. The intention of the program was for faculty to develop employer relations and gain an insider’s perspective of the company culture.

This immersion allowed faculty to understand workforce processes as part of an inclusive curriculum design to better engage students in preparation for employability because “knowing up front what employers need and want creates tighter back-end integration that improves the entire learning process” (Holle, 2012, p. 22) and results in a competitive advantage for students. Moreover, collated statistics on sustainable job placement at Autry Technology rank highest in the state, at 94% (Holle, 2012; CareerTech, 2016). Employers gain a myriad of advantages from EE program participation, including selective recruitment resulting from direct insight of project or internship performance, which could lead to future employment because the arrangement allows for a longer term interview. Additionally, the site receives up to date knowledge and access to resources through interactions with students and HEI.
Another innovative solution presented in the literature was a hybrid-method of education and career preparedness at Harrisburg University in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. In place of adjunct faculty, the Institution created a role called corporate faculty consisting of non-tenured, high-ranking business professionals who teach courses while working with local companies to collaboratively design curriculum inspired by “real-world career requirements” (Wildavsky et al., 2011, p. 43). In further examining corporate-college partnerships, current research embraces joint development of many programs, including accessible online training. John Deere, a major producer of agricultural machinery, for instance, requested partnership with Indiana University’s Kelly School of Management for an eMBA program consisting of nine custom courses targeted to potential future finance executives (Meister, 2003).

If resources or networks limit the level of partnership ability for organizations, alternatives with varying commitment exist. Community colleges have tremendous responsibility for educating older working populations who could benefit from understanding modern methods of business (U.S. Department of Commerce et al., 1999). Leary (2012) produced research from an academic standpoint focused on community college programming arming students with the legitimate education and experience to lessen middle-skills gaps. The study reinforced the academic component of technical specialties and promoted the idea that specific course and program credentials be endorsed by industry. It recommended that program specifications be turned over to a third party for review and certification as an industry standard. Hickie and Sawkins (1996) took the notion of formal approval a step further and stated “Academic accreditation of in-company programmes involves going outside the organization in order to have them approved as meeting nationally and internationally recognized standards” (para. 12).
**Higher education and community partnerships.** Partnerships including those uniting classroom and community are influential because the need to teach students how to connect locally and globally as citizens of the world has become apparent. *Global citizenship* is the direct “engagement in global issues or with different cultures in a local setting” (Green, 2012, p. 124). It “entails an awareness of the interdependence of individuals and systems and a sense of responsibility that follows from it” (Green, 2012, p. 125). Additionally, HEI and community partnerships are causative of “proactive economic development” (Cantor, 1997, p. 4). To illustrate, based on the workforce needs of local businesses and the needs of students, the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation was a leading school district in Indiana that worked to establish PBL among its high schools. Business leaders and community partners recognized the many stakeholder benefits of PBL; they initiated curriculum redesign along with the re-alignment of learning outcomes to promote 21st-century skills in direct support of workforce development. As a workforce development initiative, stakeholders also developed *The PBL Academy*, an annual professional development seminar for teachers. The Academy guided the transition of what started with 50 math teachers’ instruction of only a select few PBL courses, to over 400 educators from all subjects and grade levels implementing the construct (Cho & Brown, 2013).

In recent years, similar organizations are uniting nationally and internationally, districtwide and statewide to promote the value of partnership between stakeholders. Campus Compact, for example, is a national coalition of 1,100 HEI dedicating its mission to the support of “faculty and staff as they pursue community-based teaching and scholarship in the service of positive change” (Campus Compact, 2016, para.1). Campus Compact has offices located in 30 states across the United States, as well as a Campus Compact Consulting Corps, consisting of
faculty experts in both civic engagement, as well as service-learning (The Princeton Review, 2005). Community-based programming extends beyond volunteerism; instead it is a trifecta of service, learning and engagement on behalf of individuals toward the well-being of society (Davidson et al., 2010). To clarify, community service is the “action taken to meet the needs of others and better the community as a whole” (The Princeton Review, 2005, p. 18), while service-learning is a component of EE that utilizes community service as an avenue to “deepen classroom learning through conversation and reflection” (The Princeton Review, 2005, p. 18).

Similarly, civic engagement is defined by Ehrlich (2000) as:

> Working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes. (p. vi)

Pairing community service, service-learning or civic engagement with the methods of PBL results in an effective community engagement strategy that evokes positive small-scale and large-scale change across many stakeholder groups, particularly supported by the mutually beneficial partnerships between HEI and the larger community. Community engagement is the result of “applying institutional resources (e.g., knowledge and expertise of students, faculty and staff, political position, buildings and land) to address and solve challenges facing communities through collaboration with these communities” (Gelmon, Seifer, Kauper-Brown, & Mikkelsen, 2005, p. 1; Thompson & Jesiek, 2011).

To demonstrate, a 14-year study with over 1800 undergraduate and graduate students from 2 HEI and 40 community partners in Sao Paulo, Brazil was conducted. Researchers aimed to understand the dynamics of PBL teaching processes as well as the accompanying interaction
between partners. During the course of research, over 60 PBL courses were facilitated, resulting in the completion of 228 social projects (Amaral & Matsusaki, 2016). The study found that as the project process became more operational between existing stakeholders, it became easier to manage higher volumes of projects. The confidence from the collaborative experiences encouraged additional participation, and the institution was able to attract new faculty and community partners, enabling more PBL embedded courses throughout the curriculum.

Partnerships between HEI and the community are on the rise and have been shown to enhance student learning, offering another valid avenue for relevant project work. Davidson et al., (2010) championed the idea that:

Service-learning opportunities for students are not just one way to teach students, they are opportunities to bridge relationships within communities, bring life to theoretical concepts, and build the foundations necessary for educated citizens that will one day take lead roles in our society”. (p. 442)

Providing students ways of connecting to the community while in school is likely to transpire into future engagement after school (Eyler, 2002; Green, 2012). Community relations support emotional, social and professional growth, which are contributing factors for the future success of students (Lapan et al., 2002). Additionally, Langhout, Rappaport and Simmons (2002) claimed that school-community collaborations have historical connections linked to both Dewey (EE and EL) and Kilpatrick (PBL), suggesting that real-world problems are authentic learning opportunities to develop students. This particular case examined the incorporation of PBL in elementary school curricula. The study examined a program that built a children’s community garden and created a community cookbook which was presented at a sponsored event to highlight its contributors. The research spanned two academic years of project work and
outlined the many benefits of this strategic partnership with allies throughout the local community, including collaboration between an elementary school, neighborhood association members, neighbors, and a professional group that consisted of faculty and graduate students from a local university. The major goal was having “school staff view the community as a resource, and community members view the school as a resource” (Langhout et al., 2002, p. 332), further creating a relational exchange between stakeholders. The study realized that there are benefits beyond just one group’s objectives which increased the interest and commitment among other group members, and it also attracted new alliances to the mission of the relationship.

**Higher education and government partnerships.** The United States Federal Government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to education and workforce training through numerous investments in public policy dating back as early as 1917 (Buonora, 2016). This pledge is displayed through programs such as Hope Scholarships, Lifetime Learning Tax Credits, expanded Pell Grants, the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act, and One-Stop Career Centers (U.S. Department of Commerce et al., 1999). In consideration of the connection between government and HEI,

The role of policy in education is to define (and later defend) the educational system’s governing principles, which are designed to achieve a systemic national or state vision for education and the specific key goals that exemplify that vision. Policy is an encompassing framework that sets boundaries while also providing a level of flexibility in terms of actual implementation. (Dixon & Einhorn, 2014, p. 9)

One particular public policy which aimed to improve American education was *The School-to-Work Opportunities Act* of 1994. This program provided federal funding to assist educational
institutions in creating strategic partnerships to aid in transitioning students from high school to career and college (Lapan et al., 2002; Presidents Interagency on Women, 2000). The Act granted states and localities decision-making power in terms of system design as long as it included the following aspects: school-based learning: integrated academic and vocational education [career education]; work-based learning: workplace programs to associate theory with practice; and connection activities: coordination assistance and stakeholder involvement (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a).

Another related post-secondary education and training program authorized in 1998 by amendments made to The Higher Education Act of 1965 was titled The Fund for the Improvement of Education - Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnerships (Presidents Interagency on Women, 2000). It was developed to “enhance the delivery, quality, and accountability of postsecondary education and career-oriented lifelong learning through technology and related innovations” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-b, para. 1). This electronic learning community and pioneering grant program brought together two or more partners from establishments such as HEI, community organizations and other private or public institutions, agencies, and organizations to work on national or regional education-based reform projects via distance learning technology (Reisman, Flores, & Edge, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-b). Through this program, stakeholders had the ability to capitalize on collaborative resources that may not have otherwise been available independently (Presidents Interagency on Women, 2000). In addition, funding from one-to-one matches of requested federal funds also supported distance-learning opportunities for college students that would have otherwise been deemed underserved populations.

In a June 2016 news release, U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez stated, “Together with our partners and stakeholders, we’re carrying out the vision of revitalizing and transforming the public workforce system to reflect the realities of the 21st-century economy” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, para. 4). Furthermore, U.S. Secretary of Education John B. King Jr. says, “These rules strengthen education and workforce partnerships to reinforce the importance of postsecondary education and training in promoting better jobs for students, as well as removing barriers to employment” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, para. 5).

Federally-sponsored programs have a tendency to concentrate on low-income, undereducated, or aging populations as well as those that are unemployed, but stakeholders in state and local government are designing programs to broaden these efforts to address a wider workforce while still being inclusive of accessibility, affordability and convenience (U.S. Department of Commerce et al., 1999). It is especially important for organizational leaders and
government officials (nationally, regionally, and locally) to understand and fully consider the stakeholders involved who may be affected by high-level decision making. Research suggests that any stakeholder group that works together collaboratively would be less likely to overlook important factors of decisions that could lead to unfavorable results (Williams, 2012).

**Intercollegiate partnerships.** Aside from partnerships between higher education and industry, higher education and community, and higher education and government, partnerships between HEI was also represented in the literature. For instance, Rhode Island is home to numerous HEI with expertise in design, business, hospitality, information technology, and marketing, but when the opportunity to develop a state-wide tourism campaign that would have highly benefited from the use of local collaborative resources went underutilized, consequently, it was met with disappointment. Instead, the *Cooler to Warmer* tourism campaign was outsourced to an out-of-state marketing firm costing the state tax payers over five million dollars (Nesi, 2016; Reed, 2016). The elected Marketing Chief possessed proven experience with a history of driving over $18.5 billion dollars in revenue for Massachusetts (Nesi, 2016). The marketing firm also employed the artist responsible for designing the iconic *I Love NY* logo, seemingly a well-justified choice considering the state had relied on minimal marketing in the past and wanted something impressive (Reed, 2016). However, the design and dissemination of the campaign, including a new logo and slogan as well as an integrated website, were criticized due to issues of budget mismanagement, lack of authenticity, branding confusion and overall low quality production resulting in widespread community backlash (Nesi, 2016; Reed, 2016). Baker (2016) reported that “officials acknowledged that the plan failed to take advantage of the institutional knowledge of the state’s regional tourism boards” (para. 2), not to mention the local HEI or the community which it is promoting. Dale J. Venturini, President of the Rhode Island
Hospitality Association wrote, “The initial rollout … has further stressed the need for collaboration and communication between all parties on an integrated and targeted tourism campaign” (Baker, 2016, para. 14). This denotes the importance of acknowledging internal and external stakeholder influence. In other words, people need to interact within organizations and across organizations throughout the hierarchy to gain practical insight on complex issues. Bottom-up leadership strategies result in the best structure for collaborative partnerships involving multiple players (Lapan et al., 2002).

With the tourism campaign in the past, there are instances of effective partnerships. The U.S. Department of Commerce et al. (1999) suggests that “regional consortia” (p. 21) is a promising approach to managing issues concerning time, cost and other logistical burdens associated with employment and training. bRIdge, a program of the Rhode Island Student Loan Authority (RISLA) and RISLA’s College Planning Center of Rhode Island, relies on the value generated through partnerships. This active consortium bridges 11 academic institutions, employers, students and local government (bRIdge, 2015). Together, they have enriched the guidelines for state-wide EL development. This program represents what effective partnerships aspire to be, further endorsing the need for communal effort across stakeholders. The organization meets as a group, and in addition many of the involved academic institutions have separate partnerships distinct from the larger coalition.

Most recently, Johnson & Wales University (JWU) in Providence, Rhode Island and Roger Williams University (RWU) in Bristol, Rhode Island have united through a newly signed 3+3 articulation agreement. This partnership initiative allows JWU undergraduate students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science program in Liberal Studies the opportunity to apply for the Juris Doctor program at RWU School of Law, thus allowing fast track completion of both
degrees in six years, saving a year’s worth of student tuition dollars as well as room and board (Johnson & Wales University, 2015). These HEI realized programs were stronger for relying on joint resources, rather than settling for unnecessary independence. Michael J. Yelnosky, the Dean of RWU Law says “It was a pleasure to work with the JWU team because our institutions share an innovative ethos and a commitment to controlling the spiraling cost to students of higher education” (Johnson & Wales University, 2015, para. 5). This collaboration is one of many between JWU and RWU. The two Institutions, along with other local HEI, non-profit agencies and government are responsible for over a decade’s worth of inter-organizational projects to revitalize a community and cultural center.

**Summary**

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature pertaining to PBL and it honed in on a variety of strategic partnerships in practice. The literature showcases the history, variation, advantages and challenges among these concepts, and in doing so points out the gaps of information detailing the specifics of stakeholder interaction as well as stakeholder influences. Therefore, this study was necessary to further advance the practicality and usefulness of stakeholders collaboratively managing PBL within and across organizations.
Chapter 3: Research Design

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to understand the long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization by describing the interactions and influences of stakeholder engagement. The central research question that guided this inquiry was:

- How do a university and a non-profit organization engage in partnership to collaboratively manage project-based learning (PBL)?

The sub-questions are:

- What is the nature of the partnership?
- What purpose does an inter-organizational arrangement serve?

Chapter 3 clarifies the methodology behind the descriptive case study elected for this research. Further, it discusses the researcher’s positionality, provides an overview of the research sites, participants, and the details of their recruitment. This chapter explains the ethical considerations regarding this research, it explores the processes involving the collection, storage, management and analysis of data, and then closes with the steps taken by the researcher to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Qualitative Research

This section provides an overview of qualitative research and case study methodology, including the perspectives and research scholars with whom they are associated. A descriptive case study was selected for this research because it allows the demonstration of a variety of stakeholder perspectives, including complex relationships within their multiple realities. A case study approach helped to understand the situation better by describing phenomena in their natural environment while also providing deep levels of insight into the case. This approach is popular in social sciences as well as in fields such as psychology, medicine, law and political
science, and education (Merriam, 1998). In fact, case studies are “one of the most frequently used qualitative research methodologies in educational research” (Yazan, 2015, p. 134). Further, it is a solid method for producing research that informs professional practice (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Qualitative research is best applied when engaging in studies that report in-depth descriptions of a scenario or topic of interest (Harwell, 2011); it also focuses on understanding process (Merriam, 1998), programming (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995), activities (Stake, 1995) or partnerships (Yin, 2009).

As such, a descriptive case study made sense for this research because PBL is a modern approach to instruction relying on resourceful activities and strategic partnerships with a variety of stakeholders. Descriptive case studies in particular are ideal when documenting what a situation is like from various interpretive angles and viewpoints, so it provided an effective method in revealing individual stakeholder perceptions as they relate to collaboratively managing PBL. This methodology is beneficial when seeking the answers to who, how and why questions within a relevant contextual situation (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). A descriptive case study aligned well with the purpose of this study, which sought to understand the long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization by describing the interactions (how) and influences (why) of stakeholders (who) collaboratively managing PBL.

**Unit of analysis.** Asserting case and unit boundaries assures that studies stay within the determined scope, time, and experience of the researcher (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This descriptive case study was bound by the decade-long engagement between Johnson & Wales University (JWU) and the Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island (SCCRI) to collaboratively manage PBL. This study considered three units of
analysis including individual internal and external stakeholders, the stakeholders as a group, and the process of interaction. Observations were bound by time; a single academic term.

**Research tradition.** Case study methodology traces back to foundational methodologist Frederic Le Play. As a mining engineer and sociologist, he is best known for his contribution of an inductive research method based on systematically observed facts and published in 1879 (Healy, 1947). He was a social reformist with progressive ideas who offset traditionalist culture by studying human behavior among working class people to understand achievement of happiness and avoidance of suffering. To make sense of observations from multiple cases (working class families), he looked to many sources to provide an accurate depiction. For instance, he examined: (a) material life: work, food, clothing, and consumable goods; (b) social life: recreation; (c) intellectual: education; and (d) moral life: religion. Aside from observation, he also reviewed tangible documents, including receipts and expenditures (Healy, 1947). Le Play underscored the importance of researcher training; he specified that researchers be well-versed in the scientific method and exude research intelligence. As a result, he has contributed to both sociology as well as scientific research methods, and his work added the following three steps in collecting and analyzing phenomena: observing facts, interviewing [interrogating] participants, and seeking out informants who know the participants and subject.

Seminal principles of qualitative research design and case study methodology have been enhanced by the work of dominant methodologists including Sharan Merriam, Robert E. Stake and Robert K. Yin; each methodologist possesses a unique viewpoint of case study methodology embracing a range of guidelines depending upon their individual philosophical distinction or research paradigm.
**Research paradigm.** According to Ponterotto (2005), research paradigms can be understood as a “set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of that world” (p.127). They encompass distinguished ways of thinking about the world, aiming to guide, focus, and classify the structural context of research, which allows the researcher to gain perspective on opportunities and boundaries of a specific topic or problem. Merriam’s (1998) approach is constructivist, classifying a case as “a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). Stake’s (1995) approach is also constructivist; his perspective suggests a case is an integrative system, or rather “a specific, a complex, functioning thing” (p. 2). Yin’s (1994) approach is positivist/post positivist, as he claims that a case is “a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context” (p. 13). In addition to the variations presented in the individual definitions of cases, case studies and epistemological commitments, there is also a divide between case study design, data collection, data analysis, validation of data, and the presentation of key findings. The impactful work of Merriam, Stake and Yin are critical to comprehend prior to conducting case study research because their methodological suggestions are highly influential throughout the research process, and they provide proven guidelines for credible case study research (Yazan, 2015).

This descriptive case study is modeled after a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm in that it was conducted under the realization that there is not one best answer but rather multiple researcher perceptions based on the accurate and detailed recordings of an investigation. A paradigm attempts to challenge many assumptions made by positivist-oriented research. As people experience life, they construct meaning; an interpretivist paradigm examines
interpretations of valid realities or truth, suggesting that ideas are constructed in the mind of individuals (Ponterotto, 2005). Even in shared experiences, individuals may interpret situations differently depending on the lens in which they see the world around them.

**Role of the researcher.** In qualitative research, the researcher is the crucial instrument for collection and analysis of data (Merriam, 1998). Interpretivism exists on the premise that there are multiple realities as a result of subjectivity in knowledge and experience, as well as the belief that one’s values and beliefs cannot and should not be hidden from the research process. Additionally, this philosophy is based on the understanding that observation is heavily reliant on the values and interests of the investigator (Rocco & Hatcher, 2011). The dynamic interaction between the researcher and participant is central to capturing and describing the lived experience from both perspectives (Ponterotto, 2005). The goal of this paradigm is for researchers and participants to engage in constructive dialog and reflective interpretation. Semi-structured interviews for example, allow the researcher to openly interact with participants. Interpretivism affected this research study because data collection and analysis was performed as interpreted by the researcher, through the lens of her positionality.

**Positionality statement.** My mother has been a role model to me. She was forced to become a high school dropout in order to offset the economic hardships of her family. She later obtained a General Education Development (GED) credential, but was underemployed when my oldest sister was born and I came along less than two years later. As a result of my mother being a single parent, creating a stable life meant she had to attend college part-time, work two mediocre jobs, plus sacrifice parental involvement in extracurricular activities. Still, she was fierce and somehow succeeded in her endeavors, rarely complaining about the personal toll the stress was taking. My mother was the first in her family to attend college and receive an
associate’s degree, so besides a lack of academic encouragement she had little, if any, outside support. To be fair, no one in our family could have related to being a student in higher education, let alone combining that with the other responsibilities that she balanced. This pattern continued as I enrolled in a four-year university in 2002. She tried her best, but my mother had never been a traditional student and therefore did not know how to mentor one.

Although I had access to academic and career services, I did not know where to begin or what questions to ask in order to receive assistance. Oftentimes this left me feeling apprehensive, but I could not afford to fail. I realized that a degree did not entitle me to anything except access to information; it was my responsibility to engage in the work in order to achieve success. Over time, I began to take personal accountability in consciously believing that "the self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action" (Dewey, 1916, p. 408). I figured out how to tap into resources regardless of prior circumstances or self-doubt, efficaciously navigating both school and the workplace. In reflection, I consider myself fortunate to have witnessed firsthand the setbacks that come from the lack of stability, teenage pregnancy, a broken family structure, and the difficulties that arise from the absence of solid education. I hold a strong belief that undesirable experiences can arm people with grit or in other words the raw determination necessary to strive for more, without professionally limiting themselves by the predisposed path.

I am a white, heterosexual, 33-year-old female born into a working class family. I was raised with blue collar values that enforced the idea that a solid, indefatigable work ethic always led to success; however, the reality is that there are economic and social limitations for the working-class. Success is individually defined and professional opportunity can be complex and require more than tenacity. I am biased in thinking that non-affluent communities suffer from a
shortage of preparation for white collar employment, further sustaining oppression that limits 
career advancement. The necessity of professional networks and early exposure to the 
workplace can be critical in shattering these glass ceilings. Colleges and universities who accept 
these student populations have an obligation to equip them with the tools and experience to 
succeed in the classroom, the job market as well as in society. As a scholar-practitioner, it is my 
perspective that higher education institutions (HEI) and industry have a responsibility to develop 
the workforce together. I acknowledge experiential education (EE) as a launching pad for 
students to develop professional skillsets, because I believe that PBL can level the playing field 
despite socio-economics and provide equal employment opportunities to a wider pool of 
candidates.

As a higher-education career advisor, I support students with one-on-one and group 
professional development, and address such topics as setting career goals, attaining internships 
and securing employment. I partner with faculty to facilitate practical education and assist with 
employer relations to execute recruiting plans. As such, I am able to develop a variety of 
customized approaches to help students actualize campus-based and field-based experiences.

My professional role is a combination of administrative and teaching duties which has been 
insightful in attaining a level of expertise regarding PBL and strategic partnerships from a unique 
perspective. This view is influenced by my steady interactions with students, faculty, industry 
and administration over the last eight years, not to mention my own position as a first-generation 
student and college graduate. Moreover, it has allowed me to be at the center of the stakeholder 
phenomenon being studied and has inspired the topic of this research. However, it is imperative 
that I recognize that this position could hinder me in that I am extremely close to the subject and 
may make assumptions based on this level of acquaintance. Therefore, as I explore my
positionality, I also examine any assumptions I might have regarding the views and backgrounds of my participants.

If we consider what Briscoe (2005) says, “no matter a researcher’s intentions, their perceptions and thus representation of the other will always be from their particular perspective” (p.26), then it would be critical to look at my tri-lateral perspective of an administrator, teacher and student. To isolate personal bias, I acknowledge that I am not representing other, but rather have experience demonstrating diverse viewpoints equating to an idealistic position as the role of a research instrument. A study pertaining to the equitable enrichment for all stakeholder groups is idyllic, but it is important to declare that my understanding of these perspectives is not a true representation of these populations, but rather a modified version with distinctive standpoints. Subjectivity will be minimized to increase trustworthiness and allow natural emergences to speak for themselves.

Research Sites

The research sites for this study included JWU and the SCCRI, both of which are located in Providence, Rhode Island. JWU, the first research site, is a private, non-profit institution that was originally founded by Gertrude Johnson and Mary Wales as a women’s business school in 1914 in order to meet the demands of a changing workforce and economy. Over 100 years ago, Miss Wales was quoted emphasizing the importance of EE, stating that, “We should teach a thing not for its own sake, but as a preparation for what lies beyond” (Brouillard, 2013, para. 10). Overtime the University has expanded across four campuses: Providence, Rhode Island; North Miami, Florida; Denver, Colorado; and Charlotte, North Carolina. Together they serve a diverse population of more than 17,000 students, representing anywhere from 70 to 100 countries (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-a). Flexible options for study include undergraduate,
graduate, online, continuing education and accelerated programs in arts and sciences, business, culinary arts, education, engineering and design, health science and hospitality, among others. This site was selected based on its reputable standing in EE, as well as its active involvement with course-embedded and independent PBL programs.

The second research site is the non-profit organization Trinity Restoration, Inc. (TRI), publicly doing business as SCCRI. An exemplar of urban revitalization, SCCRI emerged in response to a community-wide need to rebuild an underutilized space suffering from “systemic disinvestment and deterioration” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-a, para. 2). The annex building of the Trinity United Methodist Church was initially built in 1914 as an education auditorium. It eventually became the original home for the well-known Trinity Repertory Company, which outgrew the theatre and forced the company’s relocation in 1974 (Cooper, Schwartzkopff, Moradsky, Keeley, Aldaham & Robinson, 2013; Trinity Repertory Company, n.d.; Trinity United Methodist Church, n.d.). Due to the building’s vacancy, a once historic landmark over time became an eroded structure and eyesore. In 2007, a group of community stakeholders proposed renovating the space to provide the Southside of Providence with an outlet for artistic expression, while also increasing tourism as well as local and state economic growth (Cooper et al., 2013). The SCCRI was born, an organization which eventually, developed collaborative partnerships for funding and program development with many regional organizations. The partners include: Community Partnerships Center at Roger Williams University, The Rhode Island Foundation, Social Venture Partnerships- RI, the Carter Family Charitable Trust, Johnson & Wales University, Stop Wasting Abandoned Property, RI Council for the Arts, Rebuilding Together Providence, and the Mayor’s Office City of Providence. (Community Partnership Center, 2013, p.4)
The involvement of Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and the continued contributions made from other project-based courses across additional local HEI, along with students from varying disciplines actively participating in several term long projects, progressed this effort greatly.

The success of SCCRI materialized from the culmination of stakeholder efforts, and together the stakeholders designed and executed substantial community-based work. As a result, the empty property was revitalized to include both indoor and outdoor community spaces. The non-profit organization “has provided a canvas for PBL while attaining pro bono support in areas of marketing and communications, strategic planning and feasibility studies, technical writing and operations support, and research and design and construction” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-b, para.6). SCCRI is a unique platform for community engagement, and has been called an “anchor institution and cultural incubator” (ArtPlace, 2016b, para. 4), reflective of the people living in the Trinity Square neighborhood. This decade-long strategic partnership was the result of extensive collaboration and integrated resources to collaboratively manage PBL.

Participants

The target population of participants was identified using a purposive sample based on the purpose of the study and the researcher’s judgement. The participants comprised a network of five stakeholders across three stakeholder groups including a JWU Administrator, three JWU Faculty Members and a SCCRI Project Partner. Participants were selected based on their role, professional credentials and relationship to the sites. The Faculty Members span a range of six to twelve years of experience facilitating PBL. The industry and years of PBL experience had no direct reflection on the selection of participants. Age, gender, ethnicity/race, socio-economic level, literacy level and health also had no bearing on choice. The Administrator and Faculty
Members reflect individuals with diverse management experiences and backgrounds involving PBL facilitation within varied disciplines, academic levels, course subjects and class sizes at JWU, an institution that self-identified (through brand marketing) as experientially focused. The Project Partner was selected based on active involvement with the affiliated project work in collaboration with the other participants selected for this study.

**Recruitment and access.** The researcher determined the inclusion and exclusion criteria during the development of the dissertation proposal based on the needs of the study in order to align with the theoretical framework and to answer the research questions. It was then reviewed and approved by the Principal Investigator (Dissertation Advisor). Once permitted, the application with all required research components was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at NEU for permission to proceed with recruitment. Special approval to include preliminary data including interview material, transcripts and analysis from prior NEU research coursework was requested in the application and later approved. At the same time, JWU’s IRB was also contacted to seek approval to conduct research at the institution. Beyond this, no formal recruitment activity took place until after IRB authorization (See Appendix A).

As this study uses actual site identifiers and sought information that contained confidential material, a letter of support email was sent from the researcher to executive level leadership at both research sites. The letter outlined the researcher’s intentions and requested responses stating that both the institution and organization were aware of the research and support the aim of the case study, which publicly recognizes the participation of the sites. The letters of support were both obtained and filed by the researcher. The access to the Administrator, Faculty Members and Project Partner was based on the researcher’s professional networks established through being employed at one of the research sites. Participants were recruited
through a voluntary agreement to participate via an email request (See Appendix B). The letter explained the purpose of the study, as well as the terms and conditions of being a participant, including time commitment and task expectations. The scheduling of interviews and observation sessions were communicated through email. The location and time for the exchanges were based on the convenience as well as comfort level of both the researcher and participants. A total of two observation sessions took place, one at each of the site locations, in connection with the institution/organizations operational and personal schedules.

**Ethical considerations.** This research required one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, as well as observations of internal and external SE related to the collaborative management of PBL. To assure the protection of human research subjects, this study abided by the standards and practices set forth by the IRB. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certified the researcher as having successfully completed the NIH web-based training course: *Protecting Human Participants* on 12/01/2015 [Certification Number: 1928430]. Prior to engaging in data collection activities related to this study, the researcher provided participants with the informed consent to sign (See Appendix C). The document outlined the process of participation including details that regarded the participant’s ability to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice.

At the start of the interview, at each participant’s conveniently chosen location, an overview of the study, its purpose, and the participant’s role including the informed consent, was discussed. The participant’s ability to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice, was stated on the document and was also reiterated verbally. It was made clear that the researcher was available to respond to questions or concerns at any point in the study.

Participation in the study was handled in an ethical manner. This research did not involve
vulnerable populations, and there were no obvious risks to participants, who consisted of consenting educators and a business professional.

There was a minor possibility of the loss of confidentiality of participants, as the study uses actual institution and organization names for the benefit of demonstrating them as exemplars, deserving of public recognition. The participants have played various essential roles in the management of PBL between the sites; however, the seriousness of this risk would have been minimal and was disclosed to the participants as a precaution. The informed consent included a section that allowed participants to self-select and sign off on their preference to either remain confidential, or be openly recognized in the study. Some participants allowed their names to be used, which mitigated the risk of the loss of confidentiality entirely, while those who elected the use of a pseudonym accepted that the minimal risk was outweighed by the potential benefits of the knowledge gained.

As an additional safeguard, the specific data that was collected went through a process of member checking; the data transcript along with its representation was approved by the participants, determining the totality as an accurate and suitable depiction of their situation.

Participation in this study was voluntary and no incentives, direct benefits or any kind of remuneration were offered to participants in exchange for their involvement in the study. It was merely an opportunity for participants to share their passion, views and experiences with a wider audience.

**Data Collection**

This section describes the data that was collected in alignment with case study methodological approaches. Merriam’s (1998) comprehensive data gathering procedures and utilization of analyzing documents, interviews, and observations will be the primary guide for
the collection process. That being said, Yin’s (2009) principles in connecting data collection activities to the research questions and theoretical framework, as well as his procedures for the use of multiple evidentiary sources will be equally as influential. Stake’s (1995) data gathering approach was also considered, as he also supports the use of document review, interviews and observations. Case studies differ from other qualitative approaches in that data is almost always collected through multiple sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). The specific data sources identified for this study are outlined in Appendix D; they are associated with the data collection activity and research question to which they most directly pertained. As there was overlap in sources, those columns have been merged.

**Document review.** The document review process consisted of capturing accessible information to assist in understanding the context of case and SE in greater depth, as well as to enhance and support interview and observation data. Strategic plans, websites, course catalogs, curriculum, awards, and magazine publications were examined to gain a sense of how the research sites conveyed their mission and values in support of EE, EL, PBL and SE. These documents communicated operational processes of programs, engagement in strategic partnerships and also mapped organizational structures to understand how and in what ways stakeholders engaged. This review process expanded the researcher’s knowledge of collaborative practices, clarified and made sense of previously-gathered information, and increased the researcher’s awareness of information relevant to the case or related to the research questions. Published PBL projects from JWU, RWU and RISD were identified to see if there was any mention of data that pertained to strategic partnership, the research questions in terms of SE, the specific partnership under investigation, and the purpose of inter-organizational arrangements. News articles were located to understand developments in the case or partnership
worthy of public relations, as well as to gain an awareness of the sequence of events and media portrayal of the research sites. It was requested that study participants share any internal organizational documents (hard or electronic copies) such as process maps or partnership logs that would be helpful in understanding the case better or to inform the research questions. However, a majority of that information was publicly available, so no confidential or proprietary internal documents were utilized.

**Semi-structured interviews.** The principal data collection method for this research study consisted of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with five stakeholders across three stakeholder groups. The participants were asked to answer open-ended interview questions regarding their direct experiences related to the purpose of the research study, again to inform the research questions. This study offered participants an opportunity for discussion through interviews lasting 30-45 minutes, with follow-up as needed and agreed upon by the participant. An interview protocol (See Appendix E) which had been vetted by the researcher, three doctoral students and two professors was followed and applied as a strategy to frame data collection during the interview process. The protocol featured five questions, as well as follow-up questions that sought more specific information when not provided by the participant, this included follow-up questions to clarify facts, opinions and insights. As the interviews were semi-structured, the researcher relied on her experience and inserted prompts as needed to refocus or redirect the participant. Interview questions and sessions extended beyond the protocol and the initial interview as necessary to capture critical data or to learn more about unanticipated phenomena.

The interviews were captured using a digital recording device, a Sony hand-held recorder. Permission to record the session was requested in writing as part of the informed
consent form, and it was also reiterated verbally prior to the interview. Observations of perceived physical responses, mannerisms and emotion during the interview were reported in field notes as needed; they were added as electronic comments in the transcript margin. Note-taking was kept to a minimum as to not distract the participant or the flow of the interview. Follow-up interviews were scheduled as deemed necessary to attain supplementary information as agreed upon by the researcher and participant; one to three interview sessions per participant sufficed.

Observations. In addition to document review and interviews, the inclusion of field-based observation sessions enhanced the validation of previously collected data, as it clarified as well as confirmed the information gathered through the other data collection techniques. An observation protocol was crafted to guide the process (See Appendix F). Permission to witness first-hand the engagement between SCCRI and JWU stakeholders was granted by a JWU Professor referred to as “Faculty D” and the newly hired assistant to the SCCRI Project Partner for the particular project of focus at the time the research took place. Faculty D facilitated the introduction between the researcher and the entire class and the researcher and SCCRI in advance via email to discuss the researcher’s attendance. Faculty D shared the observation protocol details with all of the students and the site to inform them of the researcher’s role, which was to observe and collect information and then provided a safe channel for students to connect with her if they had any hesitations or questions regarding the session. The students and site were overwhelmingly supportive and demonstrated no signs of concern.

The observations were scheduled in week three of the JWU spring term, based on the participant’s availability. Each observation session lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. The first session was hosted at SCCRI, which provided an opportunity to witness the collaborative
exchange between the Project Partner, his newly hired assistant and a group of four students of varying degree programs enrolled in a project-based course with an Experiential Education Attribute (EEA) at JWU. An EEA “signifies a credit-bearing course in which a primary feature of the learning environment is the development and application of academic and professional skills in the context of work experience, service or a project that involves a ‘real life’ community or industry partner” (JWU Providence Hotel Department, 2016, para. 4). It indicates the course’s use of EL as a method to achieve objectives (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-i). Observation captured the interaction between the stakeholders’ meeting for the first time to get acquainted, communicate expectations and exchange ideas. The second session took place the following day in a classroom on the JWU Providence Campus and focused on the project status report. This session included a presentation and discussion between Faculty D and multiple JWU student teams, each comprised of four students, regarding the exploration of preliminary strategies to initiate the project work relative to the expectations of the client.

**Research journal, field notes and analytic memos.** Research tools such as a research journal, field notes and analytic memos were maintained and examined as part of this qualitative study. Together they explained the researcher’s positionality throughout the data collection and data analysis research processes. Although distinctions between the documentation formats exist, oftentimes the boundaries of the captured information are muddled. Therefore, a single document containing entries pertinent to a reflective research journal (reflection), field notes (description) and analytic memos (interpretation) were collected by the researcher and organized chronologically; the layout of the content transitions between narrative and bullet points to achieve optimal clarity within the allotted time constraints. During the analysis phase, document entries were examined, compared to the other sources of data, and re-examined, thereby adding
another layer of formal inquiry. Insightful passages as well as outliers in the document were highlighted to support the research findings.

The researcher’s comments and experiences before (interview planning), during (data collection) and after (data analysis) the prominent research phases of this study were articulated in the reflective research journal. The researcher used the journal to reflect on subjective areas such as raw understanding, speculation, perceived concerns, impressions, the influence of assumptions, details of project management, operational processes, decision making as well as key learnings. The researchers stream of consciousness was recorded on reflective notes to annotate patterns, concepts, practical and theoretical knowledge, relationships, emotions and leads; the reflective notes also helped to identify researcher bias and provided the context to later interpret descriptive field notes.

Field notes were taken as a record of direct observations during data collection. They included information obtained through experiences involving watching and listening to phenomena. In addition to documentation regarding the date and setting of observations, descriptive notes captured the nuance of each observation, including agenda items, events, activities, attendees, direct quotes, paraphrases, actions, verbal communication, non-verbal communication, mannerisms, and behaviors. Essentially, any seemingly critical details that stood out as having the potential to better assist the researcher in recalling and describing the observed situation were documented.

Analytic memos were written throughout data collection, data transcription and data analysis processes detailing concepts or patterns that emerged during the iterative review, synthesizing reflective and descriptive document entries. The memos explained what the researcher thought she was learning, what she was seeing or not seeing, and also emphasized her
decision making, justification, and interpretation of coding choices. For example, it explained what the defining coding criteria was and when the theoretical framework was used as a guide.

**Data Storage**

While participants were not exposed to any obvious risks, the researcher and principal investigator were the only ones with access to raw data and fully comprehend who participated in the study. In some cases, however, the participants elected to be openly acknowledged in the published research by granting permission on a signed consent form. Digital and electronic data were stored on the researcher’s encrypted laptop, as well as on a password-protected Google Drive account as storage back-up. Hand-written data such as research journal entries, analytic memos and field notes, as well as any printed information, was kept in designated notebooks, which were and continue to be stored in a locked file cabinet when not in the direct possession of the researcher. To maximize security, all raw data including audio recordings, interview transcripts and related notes will be destroyed within three to five years after the study’s publication.

**Data Management**

An initial read-through of the raw data without making any notes allowed the researcher to become acquainted with the content. To organize the collected data, the transcription was conducted using Rev.com professional transcription services, and it was analyzed by hand as well as using MAXQDA 12 software. Recorded interviews were primarily transcribed word for word, except in cases when irrelevant or duplicative words or pauses would have been otherwise distracting. The transcript was copied into a Microsoft Word document for ease of editing and was then emailed to the participants for member checking.
Data Analysis

This section addresses the treatment and analysis of collected data. There are many scholars associated with case study methodology, each of which propose multiple ways to analyze data. As such, a variety of those philosophies have been integrated to form a customized approach. To maintain consistent with the key scholars in case study methodology as discussed in previous sections, a general review of data collection and analysis techniques conclude that while Merriam (1998) offered comprehensive data collection procedures, Yin (2002) provided solid analysis principles, both of which can be helpful for novice researchers (Yazan, 2015). However, Yin (2002) tended to gravitate toward combining quantitative and qualitative data, whereas Merriam’s (1998) overarching analytic strategies of consolidating, reducing and interpreting were specific to qualitative research and therefore was reflected in the overall design.

The coding process. In order to develop a strong coding and category system, data analysis incorporated components of coding processes based on the First and Second Cycles of coding adapted from Saldana (2009), along with suggestions rooted in Thomas’s (2003) General Inductive Approach. This qualitative process compares “data to data, data to code, code to code, code to category, category to category, category back to data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 45). As advised by Thomas (2003), to reduce overlap and redundancy of codes and categories, they were restructured along with the analysis of each additional data source, and then compared, condensed and revised based on the newly acquired information that developed. The two-cycle process was embedded with six major steps, which are noted throughout this section as they apply to the content being discussed: (1) preparation of raw data; (2) close reading of text [initial coding- data to data]; (3) creation of categories [common themes- data to code]; (4) overlapping
coding and uncoded text [updated codes- code to code and reclassified themes- code to category]; (5) continuing revision and refinement of category system [revised themes- category to category]; and (6) comparison of the categories across various data sources [triangulation- category back to data]. As demonstrated, the process of data analysis supports Baxter and Jack’s (2008) claim that qualitative case studies involve “deconstruction and the subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena” (p. 544).

To initiate the process, the transcript was coded through a series of cycles and steps to gain a sense of common patterns for deeper analysis, to explain “a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). The following outline articulates the two-cycle process embedded with six major steps, along with several sub-steps and coding methods which refined the collected data:

**First Cycle coding.** The First Cycle of coding was the initial attempt at coding the data; it reviewed and organized the collected information into manageable classified segments.

1. **Preparation of raw data.** All of the relevant data collected from the document review, interviews and observations were converted or transcribed into text.

2. **Close reading of text.** A preliminary reading was done to determine important and irrelevant information. Minor edits were made as appropriate to increase the quality and accuracy of the residual content. A combination of Eclectic Coding methods was employed to make sense of the data, and a more thorough scan was conducted to realize the prevailing ideas, themes and events that emerged. The coding types were selected based functionality, so they may or may not have been utilized across data sources, in their entirety or used at all, and were dependent upon the integrity of the data collected.
The use of Attribute Coding detected contextualized information such as the data type, setting, time, name and demographic of the participants; a majority of this information was collected prior to the interview. Specific program names were coded and pseudonyms were assigned to uphold confidentiality of those participants who elected not to disclose their identity (to remain anonymous). This method was well suited for this research, as the study involved multiple participants, multiple sites and multiple sources of data. Further, it had the potential to “reveal organizational, hierarchal or chronological flows from the data, especially if multiple participants with differing perspectives are involved” (Saldana, 2009, p. 57).

3. Creation of categories. The data was analyzed using Structural Coding, and was examined line by line, or in small paragraphs conditional upon the quality of the content. This coding method categorizes transcripts to provide an overview of data that assists in the identification of emerging topics, categories, and themes as they relate to the specific research questions (Saldana, 2009). The like items that emerged from the data were acknowledged and defined through categorization, which saved time and provided a holistic perspective prior to fine-tuning the presentation of data. It is important to code, and re-code data multiple times, through various methods in order to produce the most accurate qualitative results.

In an attempt to further refine the data, In Vivo Coding examined the data and detected words or short phrases from the participant’s oral or written communication that represented their meaning and behavior. This assisted with developing thick description to increase the reader’s comprehension. Thick description consists of recording detailed accounts of commentary, conceptual structures, meaning, as well as interpretations of phenomena; its inclusion enhances external validity (Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 1998).
Process Coding honed in on indications of action or interaction so that important ideas could be noted. It was also used interchangeably with the more dominant methods noted above. Process Coding helps to assemble categories into a logical order of events (Saldana, 2009). This was beneficial in detailing the organizational and operational processes involved in the collaborative management of PBL between the stakeholders.

Second Cycle coding. After the initial coding through the First Cycle, a Second Cycle of analysis was conducted. This cycle includes classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, and conceptualizing coded data (Saldana, 2009).

4. Overlapping coding and uncoded text. The processed data was scanned to determine if overlapping codes or themes existed, or if there was any uncoded text that may have initially been overlooked, but should be considered for coding. This information was either absorbed by existing codes or themes, or was updated as a new code or revised theme established to better represent the data.

5. Continuing revision and refinement of category system. All coded and categorized data was re-read several times throughout the process to be clear on the appropriate layering of the coding structure. Pattern Coding enabled a search for commonalities among the data and for relevant codes to be assigned to match the isolated patterns. This method further condenses data into categories, patterns of action and a network of inter-relationships (Saldana, 2009). It was anticipated that the naming schemes would change multiple times, reflecting the relevance and modification of the topics.

6. Comparison of the categories across various data sources. The categories were analyzed across sources and participant groups, a refinement strategy applied to expose and validate the themes. Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) suggest simultaneous data collection and data
analysis. The analysis process outlined in this section was applied to each of the data sources as they were received, and then as a whole to provide the soundest results. This additional step identified, examined and reallocated categories into final themes as they were acquired in alignment with the constant comparative method. Typical of inductive analysis, the final process connected the dots, linking specific instances or patterns to the key findings that addressed the research questions through the lens of the theoretical framework.

**Trustworthiness**

In designing this descriptive case study, the researcher was diligent in enhancing its trustworthiness through various strategies. This section details the critical aspects the researcher considered to support this claim. Case studies are the most suitable research methodology to collect and analyze in-depth case data from multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). The inclusion of document analysis, interviews, and direct observations assisted in identifying detailed patterns that illuminate meaning and greatly improve credibility, validity, reliability and trustworthiness (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Data was independently analyzed as well as collectively compared, which is important for generalizability. Although this is not always a goal of qualitative research, multiple sources of evidence broaden perspectives, limiting the potential bias within a study and producing more sound understanding (Harwell, 2011). To further increase the trustworthiness of research findings, the triangulation of multiple sources of evidence is recommended (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Triangulation of data sources provided an opportunity to cross-check findings according to multiple participant standpoints and data collection techniques. Thomas (2003) also suggests that a vital feature of inductive analysis is providing examples of text or data that associate with the findings so direct quotes derived from the data demonstrate the consistency of themes and key findings across
sources as well as participants. The inclusion of thick description found in the case narrative and in direct quotes from the participants increased the authenticity of this research study.

Participant names were revealed for those that elected to self-identify in this study. As a precaution against disclosing those participants who decided otherwise, a majority of participant contributions were de-identified following the collection of data. To report the information in a consistent manner, data was coded using the following participant pseudonyms: Administrator, Faculty A, Faculty B, Faculty C, and Project Partner. The transcript and its interpretations were emailed to the participants for member checking for confirmation of accuracy regarding the content and context of data. Participants reviewed the data for possible changes, verified their comfortability with the representation of the information, and assured that it conveyed what they wished to share. Amendments were made as requested to protect reputations and portray accurate expressions of viewpoints prior to coding the data, thus enhancing its trustworthiness. According to Yin (2009), member checking is one component in guaranteeing construct validity.

The researcher’s relevant skills, education and experience are essential elements in conducting a credible case study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). The researcher had no direct experience with PBL or authority over related processes, but the researcher has knowledge of EE and taught college level courses which helped to develop mutual respect with participants. This genuine connection encouraged candid and in-depth conversations. Additional strategies to reduce bias were applied, including upfront acknowledgment of the researcher’s positionality, as well as a documented record of the researcher’s thoughts and reflections in a research journal throughout the research process.
Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the qualitative design and research plan for this descriptive case study. It identified the rationale for selection of methodology, including its research tradition, in addition to the characteristics that align with the study. The role of the researcher, positionality statement, selected sites and participants, and methods of recruitment were highlighted, as well as an explanation of the ethical considerations to assure the protection of human subjects. Further, this chapter explained the processes for data collection and analysis through the articulation of multiple coding steps, designed to segment the raw data into more meaningful codes, themes and key findings. Strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of this research were also noted.
Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to understand the long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization by describing the interactions and influences of stakeholder engagement. Research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

- How do a university and a non-profit organization engage in partnership to collaboratively manage project-based learning (PBL)?
- What is the nature of the partnership?
- What purpose does an inter-organizational arrangement serve?

Chapter 4 reports the themes that emerged from the data collection and data analysis processes employed in this study. It is organized in three sections: (1) case background; (2) participant profiles; and (3) overview of themes.

Case Background

This section provides the background and context of the case. It consists of a decade-long chronological timeline of the inter-organizational collaboration between the two research sites and other pertinent stakeholder groups. This case describes the efforts resulting from extensive engagement through continuous project-based experiences between 2007 and 2017. Tracing the case back to inception, it developed from the steady partnership between Trinity Encore and Stop Wasting Abandoned Property (SWAP). Their concerted non-profit work constructed the foundation for the 2006 Trinity Gateway Project proposal, which was submitted to the RI Housing Network on behalf of 14 community development organizations (Bortolotti, Carey & Gabiger, 2016). As a result, Trinity Restoration, Inc. (TRI), a non-profit social welfare organization [501 (c) (3)] emerged, consequently replacing Trinity Encore in 2007 with the hope
to rectify the lack of arts, community engagement and cultural education in the Southside of Providence, Rhode Island (Bortolotti et al., 2016).

**Venture development.** In 2007, Peter Bortolotti, a Southside Providence resident and Board Officer of SWAP, who also happened to be a Johnson & Wales University (JWU) Professor, was appointed as a TRI Board Member (Bortolotti et al., 2016). In 2008, Social Enterprise Greenhouse, a social and economic business development consultant group, was tasked with steering a landscape analysis to consider various non-profit possibilities that would incorporate arts, culture, education and performance.

**Introduction of project-based learning.** In 2008, JWU’s College of Business established two community-centric EE programs. The portfolio of offerings included a *Directed Work Experience* (DWE) option, as well as a PBL option. DWE was a student-elected component both in addition and related to an academic course, while PBL was a teaching methodology that involved all registered students of a particular course. For instance, DWE provided senior level students with the option to participate in short-term, supervised classroom or field-based industry projects for non-profit sites (Connery, 2012). These programs relied on the Community Service Learning (CSL) program at JWU to provide administrative support and act as a client liaison. Student participation in DWE either fulfilled community service credit managed by CSL or internship credit managed by Experiential Education & Career Services (EE&CS).

JWU’s College of Business, CSL, administration and faculty recruited partners, created projects and identified students to participate in DWE and PBL programs. Once approved, the projects were managed between a CSL coordinator and an assigned faculty advisor, as well as by an internship coordinator from EE&CS when necessary. Overtime, the programs gained
supporters and were highlighted in the JWU Campus Magazine and marketing publications for Admissions (Connery, 2012). Accordingly, various schools and colleges within the University began to implement DWE and PBL programming to support classroom learning. Participants suggested that the value of these programs were exponential because:

Working with real ‘clients’ at a nonprofit or on campus to benefit a nonprofit provides students with not only industry-specific skills (i.e., large scale food production at a soup kitchen, web design in a technology class, or development of a marketing plan for a nonprofit fundraiser in a marketing class), but also necessary ‘soft’ career skills, like leadership, problem-solving, communication, time management, etc. This reflects JWU’s commitment to provide ‘an exceptional education that inspires professional success’ and to graduate students who have ‘the attributes and skills to excel as professionals and lead purposeful lives’. (jwulibrary, n.d.-c, para. 10)

In 2009, one of the ideas propelled forward from the work on behalf of Social Enterprise Greenhouse was a secondary public charter school founded as the Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts (TAPA). Bortolotti saw this as an opportunity to involve JWU students in an authentic learning experience, so he submitted a project proposal through JWU’s College of Business, CSL and Social Enterprise Greenhouse. Upon approval, he recruited fall term students from his Brand Marketing course and led the first JWU/TRI DWE. TAPA began operating in fall 2010 with 34 seventh-graders and now serves up to 220 students in grades seven through twelve (Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, 2015).

By winter and spring term of 2010, interest expanded with the inclusion of seven additional JWU courses involved in project-based work. In late February 2011, these JWU constituents along with the addition of student interns organized two events: The *Reborn Gospel*
Concert, an annual fundraising event for TRI and TAPA, and Inside the Circle, a songwriter workshop series and fundraising event in cooperation with Higher Ground International and RI Songwriters Association. Attributable to TAPA’s growing success concluding its first academic year, it was re-located to function as a “self-sustaining organization with its own governance” (Bortolotti et al., 2016, p. 3). This created an opportunity to utilize the available space and resources toward a new initiative. JWU advertising students and associated faculty collaborated to identify a brand name initiative for the TRI complex by which the development of Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island (SCCRI) began. JWU’s School of Technology students and interns continued working on website and database integration.

**Change in leadership.** Mim Runey was selected as President of JWU in July 2011 and has since been credited with renewing campus and community pride. President Runey’s leadership steadily transitioned all four campuses toward a new strategic direction entitled The Centennial Plan: 2017 (Borg, 2013). This plan included the expansion of the University with a $300 million budget allocated toward facilities, and it focused on the development of relevant academic programs, in addition to strengthening community engagement (Taraborelli, 2012). In relation to The Centennial Plan, PBL “reflects JWU’s commitment to ‘offer relevant programs that maximize student potential’ and to ‘enrich our academic programs with experiential and work-integrated learning’” (jwulibrary, n.d.-c, para. 9).

**Continued engagement.** SCCRI was officially established in 2012. The non-profit organization “connects, cultivates and engages community through the arts” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-d, para. 1); moreover, they are “driven by the community, fueled by the arts” (Pina, 2016, para.1). The extent of the partnership between JWU and SCCRI was formally acknowledged in 2012 when Bortolotti was nominated as one of four finalists for the
esteemed Thomas Ehrlich Civically Engaged Faculty Award, which “is bestowed annually to recognize one senior, tenured faculty member for exemplary leadership in engaged scholarship, contributions to the public good, and advancing students’ civic learning” (Campus Compact, 2012, para.1). Additionally, Bortolotti was named the Rhode Island Campus Compact Statewide Presidential Faculty Fellow, a grant program that provides “a unique opportunity for faculty to integrate engaged scholarship and community-based learning into all aspects of their personal lives- teaching, research, and service” (Rhode Island Campus Compact, 2015b, para. 2). A requirement of the program was to “integrate or enhance an academic service-learning course component, a community-based research project, and/or a community-campus partnership” (Rhode Island Campus Compact, 2015b, para.4). Bortolotti accomplished this through his steady involvement with the TRI project (Rhode Island Campus Compact, 2015a).

JWU student and SCCRI client projects continued with advancements made in recruitment efforts to attract SCCRI board members, the marketing and communication of events, as well as the creation of a branding platform to officially launch SCCRI. Both winter and spring 2013 JWU DWE and internship cohorts planned and promoted Light Up the Arts, a multi-cultural music event held at SCCRI. To reveal SCCRI’s new branding, JWU hospitality students joined with the CSL team to host a welcome party reception for Brown University SEEED Conference attendees, “a leading national conference for social entrepreneurs, impact investors and community leaders committed to social innovation” (SEEED, 2017, para. 1).

Feasibility study and architectural design. The Community Partnerships Center (CPC) at Roger Williams University (RWU) became involved with SCCRI in September 2013 through a request for faculty and students to conduct a feasibility study with the inclusion of demographic research to assess the local landscape and benchmark urban arts and culture
programming (Cooper, Schwartzkopff, Messenger, Foundos & King, 2014). Based on the project’s success, it was later determined that the theatre space also needed assistance with graphic and architectural design. Under the direct supervision of RWU administrators, students carried out an architect-client partnership with SCCRI while utilizing major-specific knowledge to conduct research and provide professional recommendations based on their findings (Community Partnership Center, 2013; Robinson, 2013).

**JWU subcommittee collaboration.** In late 2013, a temporary JWU subcommittee was formed through the University Provost Council which included three deans from academic and service areas, the Director of Outcomes & Assessment, the Director of CSL, and representatives from Student Academic Services. The subcommittee were tasked with ensuring consistencies in management and the student experience by working together on standardization and documentation of outcomes for the DWE program. The structure and policies prior to the subcommittee did not “allow the university to leverage the benefits of [project-based student experiences] because it lacked a way of collecting good stories and sharing them with our constituents” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). The improved process was “a collaborative effort” and “the group worked well together” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

Several faculty were asked for input on a revised DWE outline, a proposed assessment plan, and a comprehensive project partner application form. As an additional modification to the existing programs, DWE and PBL were renamed to *Directed Experiential Education* (DEE) and *Course-Embedded Experiential Education* (CEE). An examination of previous and current course catalog entries (See Appendix G) reflected multiple program updates regarding the shift from DWE to DEE. For example, the updates extend the project period from flexible to term
long (4.5 credits), require weekly group seminars and a final project presentation, expand partnership opportunities beyond non-profit clientele, and lastly, increases the commitment and accountability of internal partners (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-g; Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-h). DEE “offers students an intensive, term-long, project-based experiential learning opportunity conducted under the supervision of a faculty member. Experiences are driven by a specific industry-based or functional-area-based project completed for a nonprofit or for-profit DEE partner” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-g, para. 1), and CEE is an “intentionally designed [program] to enhance student knowledge acquisition and course-related skill development while at the same time meeting an articulated need of the community or industry partner” (JWU Providence Hotel Department, 2016, para. 5).

**Tenant recruitment.** Throughout 2013, SCCRI continued recruiting tenants in alignment with their mission, which was said to have created powerful partnerships because they directly connect art and culture (ArtPlace, 2016a), and “generate needed revenue” (personal communication, March 20, 2017) to sustain SCCRI. As of 2017, SCCRI is home to six organizations and it is also closely affiliated with virtual tenants such as TAPA, who in 2014 was granted a five-year charter renewal (NBC 10 News, 2014; Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-f).

**The SouthLight project.** In February 2014, a visiting Architecture Professor and Co-founder of the Social Light Movement, a philanthropic venture aiming to increase urban accessibility to lighting, led Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) students on an experiential art project (Goldstein, 2016; RISD, 2014; simonesolondz, 2016b). To bring the project to life, RISD students brainstormed with local businesses and community residents to draft a needs assessment to determine areas of improvement. The Professor worked with the students to
consolidate their ideas, which they presented at a community stakeholder meeting (RISD, 2014). Following the presentations, the stakeholders in attendance offered constructive criticism that was considered by students during implementation of the project. The project was titled *SouthLight*, an honorary public art installation (RISD, 2014; risdurbaninterventions, 2014). The community exhibition temporarily illuminated the Grace Church Cemetery, an underutilized space located in the Southside of Providence with an interactive light display of candles, LED lights and projectors with recordings of the people of Providence (Goldstein, 2016; RISD, 2014).

Deemed a community success as a pilot study, *SouthLight* was utilized by RISD and the City of Providence as a permanent prospect for the cemetery including an outdoor complex to increase community engagement and public safety. However, because of the delicate nature of the space, these innovative ideas were met with concern (ArtPlace, 2016b; Goldstein, 2016). SCCRI saw this as an opening to collaborate regarding cross-utilization of space, particularly because they are neighboring properties located in Trinity Square Historic District. Accordingly, SCCRI contributed partial funds from a $300,000 award from ArtPlace America to RISD as means to initiate the project with the intention to take over administration after the project’s completion (Goldstein, 2016; Simonesolondz, 2016b; SouthLight Design Build, n.d.).

Additional funding for the project was sourced from RISD, Rhode Island Housing, and LISC (Goldstein, 2016; SouthLight Design Build, n.d.).

**Economic impact study.** In 2014, JWU students initiated work on appropriate SCCRI business documents. In January of that year, a RWU faculty member gathered students to participate in the development of a progressive business plan with a focus on independent financial sustainability. Along with the support from the City of Providence, a steering committee and the CPC, students were tasked with an economic impact study incorporating a
plan outlining “the community profile, marketing, human resources, operations, construction management and financial plans” (Cooper et al., 2014, p. 4).

**Attainment of funding.** In order for SCCRI to keep up with day-to-day operations of the growing organization, infrastructure updates became necessary (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2017). In 2014, SCCRI identified funding requirements for building renovations, supplies, technology, staffing and leadership development (Bortolotti et al., 2016). Fundraising proposal documents were finalized that summer through pro bono consulting by JWU English Professor Laura Gabiger. SCCRI received numerous grants upwards of $55,000 resulting from these efforts. In 2015 “the RI Foundation awarded SCCRI with funds to further develop its Board of Directors and begin a second strategic planning phase” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-b, para. 3) to support capacity-building to increase organizational and financial stability. The City of Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, as well as LISC RI were the recipients of $300,000 from Artplace America (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-b); this award was granted to fund *Illuminating Trinity*, a creative initiative supportive of SCCRI through enhancement of technical capabilities, strategic partnerships and construction (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-b).

**Reallocation of programs.** By the end of the 2014-2015 academic year, it was determined that community service at JWU was no longer required for credit and focus was redirected towards building a culture of voluntary service within the student body. The CSL program was dissolved and Student Involvement was enlisted to oversee volunteerism, while EE&CS was tasked with managing projects involving non-profit partners for all colleges. EE&CS became the official gatekeepers to continue centralizing the process for project-based programs by implementing the functional side of the work:
The programs fit well with Experiential Education & Career Services. They are a neutral department so [processes and policies] will be fair and objective. This advancement will allow us to put some structure in place to make it easier for faculty to participate and also capture student participation. [JWU] could potentially use it as a marketing tool in the future. (Administrator, personal communication, March 18, 2016)

As a division in the academic organizational structure at JWU, EE&CS supports the overarching University mission, as its work enriches “academic programs with experiential and work-integrated learning” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-b, para. 1). The Department’s goal is “to empower students to make effective career choices and identify and pursue internships, secure employment, and navigate lifelong career direction” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-i, para. 3). EE&CS interacts interdepartmentally as well as across organizations to manage the administration of policies, procedures and programs that strengthen student experiences to increase career development and employability. They are interfaced with a majority of academic and service departments at the University and also extend relationships into the local, national and even international community to partner with employers. As a result of these efforts, JWU was recognized in 2014 with the William M. Burke Presidential Award for Excellence in Experiential Education, presented by the National Society for Experiential Education (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-j; National Society for Experiential Education, n.d.). This award credits a college or university that has made significant experiential education (EE) contributions in demonstrating institutional commitment toward student attainment of campus and community experiences (National Society for Experiential Education, n.d.).
**Capital improvements.** In Fall of 2015, JWU students were tasked with submitting recommendation reports proposing the need for a new website platform for SCCRI. By early 2016, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission had contributed three capital improvement grants totaling $450,000 to SCCRI (Pina, 2016). The awards included financial support from a Community Development Block Grant and RISCA State Cultural Facilities Bond [$300,000], as well as Historic Preservation funds [$150,000] to improve the quality of the performance space, restore outdated fixtures, and allow for handicap accessibility via an elevator (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-b).

**The new SouthLight project.** From Fall 2015 to 2016, Illuminating Trinity, the new SouthLight concept was collaboratively discussed, developed and executed. The complexities of managing several, overlapping projects across stakeholder groups proved to be a challenge requiring adaptability within a “flexible framework” (ArtPlace, 2016b, para. 2; Marullo, Moayedi & Cooke, 2009). As such, a team of RISD upperclassman in various majors joined forces on a multi-term project-based experience, and under the guidance of lead faculty they designed and constructed an outdoor open performance venue (SouthLight Design Build, n.d.). The outdoor complex entails a green space, facade signage, and lit pavilion (ProvidenceRI.com, n.d.-b; SouthLight Design Build, n.d.). RISD’s Architecture Department Head and Faculty Lead reinforced that “students have learned a tremendous amount through the design and delivery of a real project. But most importantly, I am proud that we have created a project with real impact and experienced the power of art in a public place" (ProvidenceRI.com, n.d.-b, para. 3).

Fall 2016 concluded the SouthLight project with its official grand opening held at SCCRI with the following notable stakeholders in attendance: The Mayor of Providence, The President
of Providence City Council, a senator of Rhode Island, RISD’s Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, and the Executive Director of SCCRI, as well as representatives from Art Place America, LISC and RI Housing (personal observation, September 23, 2016). SouthLight is a physical artifact representative of the collaborative vision and dedication of many stakeholders on behalf of the local community, referred to as a “new icon for the Southside” (Goldstein, 2016, para.6). RISD’s Vice President of Strategic Initiatives spoke at the opening celebration, stating that the invested stakeholders’ “commitment to learning from one another is at the heart of the project” (Simonesolondz, 2016a, para. 5); although the project is complete, he anticipates the continuation of building sustainable and interdependent relationships within the community (Goldstein, 2016; Simonesolondz, 2016a). The data from pertinent documents revealed that without the many contributions from the coalition of stakeholders, SouthLight would not have been possible (Goldstein, 2016).

**Future endeavors.** Presently, in 2017, JWU is in transition to solidify a more streamlined management and reporting system for project-based programs, relying on the collaborative efforts between internal and external stakeholders (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). Project-based programs are experiential in nature, hence the ability for the EE&CS to quickly streamline DEE program operations upon transition; still CEE, while not a new concept to the faculty who self-managed it, requires additional research, planning and interdepartmental collaboration in order to move forward (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). SCCRI is on track with organizational expansion dedicated to improving infrastructure, developing program content and offerings, as well as maintaining its ongoing collaborative efforts with local higher education partners (personal communication, March 6, 2017). Although preliminary, the prospect of SCCRI partnering with Rhode Island
College based on their reputable Performing Arts program is also being discussed (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017).

**Participant Profiles**

This study focused on the strategic partnership and inter-organizational collaboration between JWU and SCCRI. The primary source of data for this research was collected through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with three independent, yet interconnected stakeholder groups, each of which represented a distinct perspective regarding the collaborative management of PBL. The participants included a JWU Administrator, three JWU Faculty Members and a SCCRI Project Partner; the following descriptions profile their current role, professional credentials and involvement that influenced their selection in this study.

**Johnson & Wales University:**

**Administrator.** A JWU employee with over a 20-year history with the Institution, possessing extensive student services and leadership experience with a solid perspective of both student preparedness and the job market through active involvement with local and national professional associations supporting educators and employers. *Profile intentionally kept general to abide by the participant’s request to remain confidential.*

**Faculty Members.** Peter Bortolotti, MBA, is a distinguished product development professional that has been a facilitator of PBL throughout his 16-year career at JWU. As a Marketing Professor and Chairman of SCCRI Board of Directors, he is recognized as the initiator of the JWU and SCCRI partnership (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-c). Bortolotti is highly influential in the development of classroom-based EE, as well as the growth of SCCRI and the community of Providence through his role as Board Officer of SWAP.
Laura Gabiger, Ph. D., is an English Professor with 30 years of teaching experience, 17 of which have been dedicated to JWU. Specializing in technical writing and service learning, she has facilitated PBL for over 10 years in direct support of SCCRI. She is credited with the dedication of endless hours in writing numerous grants that have continued to allow SCCRI to grow and prosper. Gabiger has a trilateral stakeholder perspective; she is not only a faculty member at JWU, but she also sits on the SCCRI Board of Directors and represents industry as an independent consultant.

Elizabeth “Beth” Carey, MBA, is a Marketing Professor with 10 years of teaching experience at JWU. Carey has been a project-based facilitator for over 6 years, focused on coursework relevant to brand identity, website development, social media marketing, and event promotions. She too sits on the SCCRI Board of Directors, and also possesses 20 plus years of marketing experience, including founding the private practice Apply Yourself Today, LLC, an organization that assists students and graduates with personal branding.

Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island:

Project Partner. Richardson Ogidan, MBA., M.S., is SCCRI’s Executive Director. In his current position, he leads the operations and strategic initiatives at SCCRI and has been doing so for the last 7 years. Previously, Ogidan was the Chairman of three local Rhode Island organizations: The Community Preparatory School, the Board of Opportunities Industrialization Center of Rhode Island, the Board of Trustees of SWAP and Trustee of Eko Club of Rhode Island. Additionally, he has a 30-year business background in operations, information technology, manufacturing and real-estate development.
Overview of Themes

The following seven themes emerged in the data: (1) stakeholder alignment; (2) engagement as a result of individual interests and organizational commitment; (3) characteristics of stakeholders that contribute to the cohesiveness of partnership; (4) system-wide support; (5) reciprocity of interconnected stakeholders; (6) dynamics warranting continued stakeholder engagement; and (7) dedication to reimagining the delivery of education.

Theme 1: stakeholder alignment. The intention of the partnership between JWU and SCCRI was to unite stakeholders from “multiple diversities” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017). Currently “it seems like [the world is] focusing so much on our differences rather than our commonalities” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017); therefore, connecting a university and a non-profit organization through strategic partnership was an avenue to unify. To make the system of partnership work, it was said that “everybody has to come together to recognize the common destiny they are all tied up in” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). In other words, there “needs to be partners at a table with shared interests, shared buy-in, and goals having open debates in order to ensure the most efficient and effective model [of collaboration] is achieved” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). The data exposed that although JWU and SCCRI as well as their stakeholders may be uniquely different, their foundations are aligned and compatible with one another. A website, strategic plan and guiding philosophy review for each organization demonstrated alignment in the following predominant areas: civic engagement, collaboration, community impact, continuous improvement and growth, education, diversity and inclusion, leadership, and ethical responsibility.
**Civic engagement.** JWU takes pride in its pledge of community leadership and involvement is encouraged at all levels, by students, faculty and administration” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-e, para. 1). It is an Institution “dedicated to civic engagement” Connery, 2012, para. 10) consistently urging its constituents “to apply leadership and career skills to real-life community settings” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-f, para. 1). In relation, SCCRI’s “primary commitment is to support, elevate and engage organizations and individuals in, from, and serving Southside, Elmwood and the West End neighborhoods” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-e, para. 5).

**Collaboration.** JWU is committed to “strategically using personal and institutional resources to address community needs” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-d, para. 3). While, SCCRI “explore[s] and foster[s] relationships that reinforce beneficial funding, brand awareness, and operational outcomes” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-e, para. 10). The alignment of partners in this case went beyond the big picture strategies of organizations. The Faculty Members reported having been able to cooperate with each other on smaller scale initiatives as well, because each stakeholder had something to offer as an incentive to continue the partnership in multiple capacities. In particular, the members of SCCRI have set themselves up to work alongside faculty to assure that project assignments meet course objectives and program outcomes. EE “can take a variety of forms in order to best align with course objectives and program outcomes” (jwulibrary, n.d.-c, para. 4) and the Project Partner is open-minded to new ideas involving collaboration. For example,

If I said, we want to develop a new marketing campaign or tackle their social media, it might be spec work, and we don't really have a budget, but he would be like, ‘Sure, whatever you want’. That's what I did in Spring of 2015, my class took on all the social
media accounts and wrote a complete new and improved social media plan. (Faculty C, personal communication, April 3, 2017)

SCCRI is an organization that wants to “strengthen program, performance and partnership strategies” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-e, para. 1). The Project Partner “is the kind of guy who is open to having universities have the work. He saw this as an advantage. Like bring it on because he gets human capital” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016).

**Community impact.** JWU vows to “be a good steward of [its] resources” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-b, para. 3), and to stand by that pledge, the institution has supported faculty in connecting students to organizations with work that maximizes “community impact and personal satisfaction” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-f, para. 4). EE&CS plays a critical role in these partnerships going forward as a “source that connects the project partner with the faculty” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

Along with its partners in higher education, particularly the local government and community, SCCRI is “instigating social change” (ArtPlace, 2016c, para.1) one project at a time. The *Community Innovation Lab*, for instance, is “an unconventional approach to helping community stakeholders from multiple sectors work together in to address an urgent and specific social challenge” (EmcArts, 2017, para. 2). This collaborative stakeholder initiative “has brought community members, social service agencies, municipal workers, public safety, community organizers, and artists together at SCCRI to talk about social and systems change in the neighborhood” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-b, para. 4). SCCRI is making an impact because it offers a “communal shared space” (Cooper et al., 2014, p. 4) that brings various stakeholders together that may not have otherwise been connected. Its location is
ideal for collaborative interactions because it is positioned at the center of three major neighborhoods in Providence; Southside, West End and Elmwood. Moreover,

Like they say in business, location, location, location! It was the perfect location for somebody to think about what goes on here and what would be appropriate for this location that would affect the lives in this community. Bringing in foot traffic would help alleviate the problem of safety and security because when you have foot traffic it will mitigate, to some degree, the issue of homelessness. (Project Partner, personal communication, March 6, 2017)

Faculty A articulated, “In order to eliminate [poverty] or to bring those places up, you're either part of the problem or you’re part of the solution” (personal communication, March 28, 2017). He decided to be part of the solution and moved into the Southside community. Faculty A stated “I live there and I chose to live there, because I could afford to buy the house. It was a cute place. I also did my homework and I realized there were a lot of organizations [trying to uplift the community], and that's how I got involved in SWAP” (personal communication, March 28, 2017) in 2001.

The Project Partner has also been an involved community member of SWAP since 1995. It was through SWAP’s membership that Faculty A “found that they didn’t just build the houses, but they connected the houses to the community because they involved community policing. They involved kid’s programs, afterschool programs and stuff that helped foster community as part of the process” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017). The data proposed that the impact generated through stakeholder engagement (SE) has been substantial in a variety of areas: social, political, economic and cultural, due to the interconnected nature of involvement between the partners. For example, “they are all in each other’s business, they are on each
other’s boards, and they are trying to rehabilitate that neighborhood, trying to get stuff to happen there” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016).

**Continuous improvement and growth.** JWU strives to become “the foremost university offering relevant education that inspires professional success and lifelong personal and intellectual growth” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-c, para. 2). The Administrator affirmed that JWU has “always been experiential in nature. We have stayed true to that mission” (personal communication, March 3, 2017). Strategic partnerships pertinent to PBL “support experiential learning opportunities, and enrich the student experience and campus climate” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-c, para. 2).

SCCRI’s strategic map lists advancing operational excellence and growth as one of its top four priorities. To do this, along with the assistance from local HEI, faculty and students, SCCRI members implemented and improved their community-focused operational model, constructed a Board of Directors, crafted a personnel policy, developed an IT infrastructure, and defined flexible staffing plans (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-e). As a result of the progress:

The future potential of this location is huge! Nothing like this exists. Next is implementation of all of the stuff we have taken almost 7 years to put together; we are at the implementation stage. The best plan you put down sometimes fails because of bad execution. Now are the schools going to be involved with the execution side of it? I don’t know. (Project Partner, personal communication, March 6, 2017)

The Project Partner is interested in branching out to pursue additional JWU stakeholders that align with the next phase of the business plan. The organization is making headway; partners have planted the seeds and they are “starting to sprout. If it gets too much sunshine and not
enough water, it'll die. If it gets too much water and not enough sunshine, it'll die. It needs nurturing, it needs growth, and it needs people who can get behind it” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017). This transition presents an opportunity for JWU to involve additional majors because “Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island is a goldmine for learning because it touches upon every possible school here” (Faculty C, personal communication, April 3, 2017). The faculty that have invested in the partnership agree, that “there's so much potential” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017) and “we haven't even scratched the surface at Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island” (Faculty C, personal communication, April 3, 2017).

**Education.** JWU’s strategic plan works toward “strengthening its status as an innovative leader whose education is recognized as an effective 21st-century model of higher education” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-c, para. 5). As such, non-profit organizations are a solid match because they “enhance opportunities for local, national and international citizenship” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-c, para. 4) and “when you expose students to that kind of a thing, [diversity], it's an awesome environment” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017) for authentic learning. Likewise, “SCCRI believes knowledge and mutual respect are enhanced when we share space, create and learn together” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-d, para. 8).

**Diversity and inclusion.** Collaboration between HEI and the local community supports JWU’s guiding principle that embraces “diversity for a richly inclusive community” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-c, para. 3). Faculty C affirmed that,

> When you talk about the concept of culture you're not just talking about culture from what we normally think of as culture, ethnic culture. We're talking about organizational
culture, business culture, and the client provider culture. We try to teach the students that if you really want to thrive in this ever-changing workforce, you really have to understand how to work with so many different people who have so many different cultural backgrounds. (personal communication, April 3, 2017)

SCCRI believes in the local community and the widely diverse people in it, so they “foster belonging, self-expression, interdependence, and engagement” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-d, para. 6). The Organization “embraces an intersectional, multi-issue approach to art, programming, partnership, inclusion and community building” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-d, para. 9). SCCRI “collaborate[s] and coordinate[s] with local, regional, and national partners in service of our community” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-d, para. 5). An organizational task that influenced SCCRI’s business direction was that its members wanted to bring awareness to their cause by including the neighborhood and pricing programs in such a way that allowed for their participation. SCCRI was built with and for the community people and the Organization remains cognizant about its history and motivation, therefore the Project Partner declares that “we don’t want it to be an institution that excludes the neighborhood folks, we want to engage them” (personal communication, March 6, 2017).

Leadership. As an integral part of the University’s purpose, JWU commits to “model ethical behavior” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-b, para. 3) by engaging with non-profit organizations as a demonstration of their “awareness of ethical responsibility and cultural/ global diversity, to live and work collaboratively as contributing members of society” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-b, para. 6). The JWU website leads each student to action by asking if he or she is “ready to become a more ethical leader?” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-f, para. 4).
The University suggests that if they do, then the opportunity to work “with a real client and play a pivotal role to support a nonprofit” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-f, para. 7) is an appropriate avenue, because these engaging experiences give students the chance to practice career skills in a real-life environment. If HEI would, encourage people, [and] give them an opportunity to make a difference, and really, truly did that, then [people would be more likely to engage]. It's one thing to have a poster on the wall telling you that you need to do this, and it's another thing through actions to have people encouraged to solve a problem and have their backs. (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017)

JWU’s approach is to “teach and motivate [students] to understand the role [they will] play as citizen[s] in the work of community building and problem solving” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-d, para. 2). This is a critical factor that relates back to JWU’s mission of inspiring “lifelong personal growth” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-b, para. 1).

The Project Partner has been a trusted community leader for decades, one that lives up to SCCRI’s mission of connecting, cultivating and engaging the community, serving “as an example of inclusive art making, kinship, and cultural expression” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-d, para. 2). The Project Partner exemplified his commitment to the Southside by having lived and worked in the community for close to 40 years. He proclaimed, "I have no doubt that the work we do this year will help us build a model of collaboration. I've had a long term vision that this building would be a neighborhood anchor” (ProvidenceRI.com, 2015, para. 11).

**Ethical responsibility.** JWU and SCCRI both exhibited intentions of democracy and service on behalf of the common good, and Faculty B advised that “when you want to bring
everyone in it and I would hope that a democratic civilization would want everyone to have a
decent education, then you have to rethink your education model” (personal communication,
May 3, 2016). PBL “can take place in collaboration with a variety of organizations whose work
is intended to bring about community benefit and/or public good” (jwulibrary, n.d.-c, para. 2).
SCCRI is a non-profit organization that allocates its profits toward providing community-based
services. When looking at the group of involved stakeholders, many questions come to mind
such as “Where do resources flow and between what people? Who helps who, who is the giver
and the receiver?” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). Faculty B suggested that
partnerships are give-and-take, but HEI are in a position of power as they are the connector of
these transactions (personal communication, May 3, 2016).

JWU was the first institution that SCCRI partnered with to collaboratively manage PBL.
As demonstrated, the organizations are strategically and philosophically compatible, so they
joined forces to pilot the partnership. Once operational, the partnership format was utilized as a
model allowing additional faculty to come on board, and for SCCRI to “continue relationships
with other higher education institutions” (Project Partner, personal communication, March 6,
2017) in Rhode Island. Subsequently, multiple JWU faculty got involved and SCCRI “has
partnered with several area universities since its inception, providing students and faculty
opportunities for learning and skills development in a robust, diverse and creative setting”
(Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-b, para. 6).

Theme 2: engagement as a result of individual interests and organizational
commitment. Throughout this research study, each of the participants expressed how their
individual interests influenced their commitment to the mission, purpose, and values of the
organization in which they work. The Administrator points to EE as the primary reason for joining JWU because,

the method of teaching was beyond the classroom and allowed [an applied] learner like me to find a teaching model that met my learning needs. My personal impact is I went from an average high school student, to this environment of hands-on learning and graduated with a 4.0. I am still here 22 years later, which was not part of the plan, but it says something about the environment here and the curriculum and its ability to take an average student and produce a leader. (personal communication, March 3, 2017)

Similarly, Faculty B reported that her attraction to the University was its practicality because she commits herself to exerting effort that is impactful. She claimed that she was,

deliberate in wanting to come [to JWU] because it is experiential education focused. It is very practice based, and I wanted to educate people in a way where you still need theory and you still need to do research, but you unite the two in practice in a reasonable way. I had grown up in academia where they were splitting the hair on the back of the flea, on the back of the mosquito, on the back of the dog. (personal communication, May 3, 2016)

Faculty A’s motivation is to satisfy his life’s purpose of having a purpose. He said “kids today think that fame and fortune is the thing, but that wasn’t the case when I was growing up. The goal was to find something to do that was useful, to be part of a commitment, to be part of society” (personal communication, March 28, 2017). Faculty A believes that HEI lead by presenting the opportunity, and that students will by nature become more interested since, “we all want to be part of something” (personal communication, March 28, 2017) and connect to something greater than ourselves. For Faculty A, that something is teaching. He said “I love what I do. I may see ways that things could be changed, but that's my nature. The bottom line is
that I like what I do. I like getting up in front of a classroom and engaging students” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017).

Faculty C mentioned her personal interests as well as the functionality related to the industry discipline she represents as the encouraging factors in support of PBL partnerships. She asserted, “I'm really into culture and the arts, so I probably wouldn't be as invested in something that didn't involve culture and the arts [or relate to the courses I teach]; all nonprofits are desperate for marketing, so it's a no-brainer” (personal communication, April 3, 2017).

ArtPlace’s Executive Director stated that collaborative projects “demonstrate how imaginative and committed people are when it comes to enhancing their communities with creative interventions and thoughtful practices” (ProvRI.com/ ArtPlace, 2015, para. 5).

The Project Partner, for example, discussed professional ambition and creative freedom as his core influencer:

It is hard to find people that would make the sacrifice [to take on a successor position in a non-profit organization] because we don't have the money to pay. We would need somebody that will say ‘okay, yeah this place is raw and I could basically develop my own revenue steam, my own salary, and I could build this up to the point where I decide what I get paid because I am so good at bringing this in, and that in’. I want someone with an entrepreneurial spirit like I have. I have an MBA, two Master’s Degrees and I ran a company for 12 years. I am not looking for a risk-taker, somebody that just wants to come in and manage the risk. I am personally looking for somebody that comes in and says ‘I'll give it a shot’ and if they fall flat then I will be there to say ‘it’s okay, but next time learn from it’. [Alternatively], if they hit it then they’ll look like a genius. (Project Partner, personal communication, March 6, 2017)
**Theme 3: characteristics of stakeholders that contribute to the cohesiveness of partnership.** The participants explained that long-term partnership and the cultivation of continuous projects demands more than interest and commitment; they stated partnerships require stakeholders to possess certain characteristics such as: critical thinking, flexibility, open-mindedness, optimism, passion, self-motivation, time, and trust. Adaptability was presented multiple times in the data, including passages such as, “nothing ever goes as planned. I can’t name one marketing plan that I was ever involved in, all these years, that ever went according to plan. Never ever. You make a plan, but then you adapt, you adjust to it” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017). During the duration of the relationship between JWU, SCCRI and other local HEI, there were “multiple changes of course” (simonesolonedz, 2016, para. 1). In regard to PBL,

there are times when the client is the expert, or the client can provide resources, or has the resources that need to be organized, and there are times that the student becomes the expert or the provider, and there are times that it’s the faculty. Our role [as engaged stakeholders] is to change. (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017)

The participants pointed out that there are many moving pieces involved in engaging stakeholders, such as people, projects and processes which makes rigidity cumbersome and likely to bottleneck progress. The Project Partner stated that in collaborative environments, it is sometimes necessary to “go with the flow” (personal communication, March 6, 2017) to keep things moving.

A former JWU professor, referred to as “Faculty E”, and who served as one of the earliest implementers of PBL on campus prior to its conversion to CEE, reported application of this approach as the primary teaching method in courses which spanned a seven-year period, and
stated, “it takes someone who is dedicated to planning and execution, requiring them to be comfortable with the unknown and unexpected” (personal communication, March 18, 2016). In the industry,

it is nothing to us, [experienced professionals], to say that a company changed leadership mid-project, or a client changed his mind and he wants red and not blue. ‘Oh your teammate dropped the class?’ All of this stuff, I can roll with because I have previous experience. Not only have I rolled with it out there, but when it happens to students I say ‘Wow! Opportunity!’ (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016)

Participants claimed that partners who are dedicated and displayed certain characteristics such as self-motivation, adaptability and those that have previous field experience tended to be more successful when involved in long-term partnerships.

Theme 4: system-wide support. The reallocation of CEE and DEE program administration to EE&CS offers faculty a resource for the continued support of programs and partnerships, yet the new system poses unique challenges and will require time to develop systematic assessment and reporting tools that are not burdensome for faculty, but rather support the goal of celebrating student learning. For example, the Administrator specified that there are faculty “who are still hesitant to get involved until they can see that the road has been paved and we have worked out the kinks in the new processes” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). Although inconsistent processes were happening, EE&CS “has remedied a majority of those concerns by having a vetting system that is approved by academic deans” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). As such, there appears to be to be an affinity for the approach at an executive level and “this type of learning had the most upright
respect and support from the highest level of leadership in the University” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

Faculty A reaffirmed, “It's relationships that affect change. You can create a program and you can throw money at it, but if you don't have the people committed to it and you don't have the right relationships then it is not going to work” (personal communication, March 28, 2017). In agreement, the Administrator stated:

I have faculty who have raised their hands and have been working directly with me in some colleges, and in others I have the deans support and interest in working and making this happen, you need all levels working together. I can't speak enough about the importance of stakeholder collaboration, all being on the same page, all coming together to agree on what makes the most sense without that we would sitting over here by ourselves rolling out a structure that is not going to come alive. (personal communication, March 3, 2017)

As it stands, there is a lack of university-wide consistency throughout the various programs, majors, schools, colleges and campuses in terms of participation in PBL. For instance, Faculty B said she wants “to develop the culture in [her] discipline that the university already has for some other programs on campus” (personal communication, May 3, 2016). To further illustrate, “there are certain colleges and schools that have been doing this for so long and have picked it up even in its new structure and run with it, and then there are other colleges that don’t appear to be doing it systematically, and others which surely are doing it, but not participating in the new reporting and assessment processes (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

Upon President Runey’s leadership appointment, JWU expanded “educational offerings and community engagement” (Taraborelli, 2012, para. 3) and there has also been discussion of
launching an on-campus teaching and learning program for faculty. According to Faculty A, JWU is “rebuilding its faculty center”, which “is encouraging” (personal communication, March 28, 2017). The Faculty Members are looking forward to having a communal space to exchange ideas and best practices. As Faculty C stated,

I'd like to have more knowledge, a blog, or something where I could learn about what other faculty are doing here because every time I bump into someone who is doing something [exciting], I'm like, ‘wow, why haven't I heard about this?’ I think a lot of faculty are doing [progressive] stuff, but we just don't know about it. We don't get together enough. (personal communication, April 3, 2017)

Developing and sustaining relationships is “what leadership has become about. Leadership isn't about command and control anymore. Leadership is about building things from the ground up (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017). The Administrator explained the value of having involved leadership in the improved process, asserting, “I really need the deans’ support in creating shared speaking points to communicate the benefits, because I can’t do this without the deans’ support and voice, or their reach to faculty” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

EE&CS has been tasked by the JWU Provost Council with offering a platform to unite stakeholders and reduce inconsistencies. To bring that goal to fruition, the Administrator and Faculty Members said that all leaders across the institution need to inspire the various layers of administrators, faculty and staff involved to engage with each other to accomplish tasks, because partnerships are an integrated arrangement reliant on the cooperation of people and resources.

In Faculty A’s opinion, if institutions in general “truly want to become more committed to engaging in programs that foster social responsibility and community, they have to invest in
that process, but they also have to have conversations with the people that they choose to partner with” (personal communication, March 28, 2017). According to Faculty C, the keywords used to describe effective partnerships within and across organizations are “collaboration, communication and culture”, which she claimed “are the things that always resonate with [her] because collaboration has to happen on every level, and it has to happen at the institutional level as well” (Faculty C, personal communication, April 3, 2017). Relatedly, a RWU administrator, who refers to his position as a broker role, or more specifically as someone who triages people and projects to the appropriate channels, claimed a similar philosophy of partnerships describing them as “the three C’s: communication, coordination and collaboration” (personal communication, August 1, 2016).

**Theme 5: reciprocity of interconnected stakeholders.** The data showed that conversations regarding partnership were initiated through the identification of shared commonalities such as complimentary stakeholder resources and responsibilities. However, prior to considering the needs of others, most stakeholders are focused first on how to satisfy their own needs; for example, students tend to concentrate on preparedness and overall performance; academic administrators consider effects on accreditation and retention; faculty are cautious of experiential programs attempting to substitute the value of course work; industry worries about labor and wages as well as intellectual property issues; community is focused on resource allocation; and government is concerned with economic growth and development (Cantor, 1997; Coco et. al., 2013; Grant et al., 2010; Qualters, 2010). Eventually individual stakeholders “begin to realize that we all have strengths and weaknesses, so let's focus on bringing our strengths together as to mitigate our weaknesses, and that's what creates a really powerful team” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017). Strategic partnership to
collaboratively manage PBL was described as a “win, win, win, win, all around!” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). The coordination and collaboration required to manage PBL “involves the strengths, resources, and affiliations of all partners (students, faculty, and community) equally, combining knowledge, intervention strategies and reflection to actively solve a community problem or promote social change” (jwulibrary, n.d.-b, para. 3). Faculty B explained,

It would be extremely difficult if [faculty] had to invent made up assignments that cover all course objectives. The lack of quality, time and resources that it would take is astounding. People write text books which include made up exercises and projects, but you cannot come up with stuff of high quality as efficiently as you can with authentic projects; you can’t dream up these things. Students are at a huge advantage if they have gained some practice. When you send students to [project partners] your syllabus is done! Just by that single project. (personal communication, May 3, 2016)

From another perspective, “The non-profit organization and its clients benefit from the work performed, the students develop and demonstrate their academic and industry skills and knowledge, and they develop the skills necessary to be an active citizen in a global society” (jwulibrary, n.d.-c, para. 13). The Project Partner claimed he does not have the consistent workload to maintain a full-time staff throughout the year, and he also said salary was another concern because “There are a lot of things that pull non-profits. The constraints have always been financial” (personal communication, March 6, 2017). He mentioned that a negative consequence of the limited funds of SCCRI would force them to “worry about raising money day in and day out to keep the staff working” (Project Partner, personal communication, March 6, 2017); therefore, student assistance is appealing. As far as SCCRI was concerned, the Project
Partner indicated that the non-profit organization saved valuable resources by engaging with students, and although projects could have been completed without the assistance of HEI and their students, the Project Partner confirmed that it would have been expensive and taken much longer. While the work of past students with limited experience may have been “crude, it was effective. As they say you get what you pay for” (Project Partner, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

Faculty A concurred, “The only investment [project partners] make is some of their time to talk to the students. Many of them are thrilled with what the students produce even if I find flaws in the work that could have been improved” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). The Project Partner emphasized that because students are working in his best interest and in most cases are unpaid, he finds it fair to attend proposal presentations and offer critical feedback throughout the projects duration (personal communication, March 6, 2017). As most project partners come from the non-profit sector, Faculty B indicated that they appreciate the help from students to move projects along because resources are scarce (personal communication, May 3, 2016).

SCCRI has gained “support from area universities, private donors, and public investment” (SCCRI History, para. 4), and they continue their commitment to “partners in higher education by providing continuous opportunities for learning, growth, and mutual exchange” (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-b, para. 6). The Project Partner conveyed that he selected local HEI based on location, common interests and resources, and clarified that partners “will have to strategically pick us too, to meet the community engagement side of their needs” (personal communication, March 6, 2017). Not only is the Project Partner concerned with what he gets out of partnership, but he realized that institutions will be applying a parallel
strategy, seeking organizations that provide something equivalent in return with minimal hassle.

For instance, he said:

All I can do is prepare the Organization in such a way that we can be attractive to them for whatever they want to do. That is my philosophy, If I have gotten myself to a certain point, then somebody else will say ‘hey this person is not going to be a drag on us, just a shot in the arm’. That should be an ongoing interaction between higher education and an organization like this because the timing is right. Everyone is talking cultural equity.

(Project Partner, personal communication, March 6, 2017)

The Project Partner explained that he “always felt like before you ask someone to help you, you have to know what they are going to come help you with. Let’s figure all that out, and then we can present it to them” (Project Partner, personal communication, March 6, 2017). Similarly, the JWU Administrator stated that collaboration “is always about the reciprocity, what is it that you can bring to the table that benefits [partners]” (personal communication, March 3, 2017). There are many complimentary resources between the stakeholders mentioned in this case, to explain:

People in higher education are always willing to share, I rarely have found an institution that wouldn't. It is more about institutions making the time for these collaborations and that takes effort, because you don't know where your return on investment lies. What do you have that the other institution can benefit from and vice versa. There is no chart that tells you that, so it is through relationship building, networking and going to professional conferences. That exposure to individuals may present a model you can embrace and make your own. Unfortunately, most of us don't have the time although we have the interest and the intention. When you get back to your desk, and the reality of the day-to-
day operations kick in, it gets very difficult to move that discussion forward.

(Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

Still a work in progress, the participants in this study explained their individual commitment that has kept the discussion moving forward, which included brainstorming ways to continue improving the process of partnership and management of PBL programs.

In this case, engagement has surpassed organizational boundaries; “there are so many stakeholders even within a constituency, you have the faculty, the department chairs, academic deans” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017), not to mention the external stakeholders. Collaboration between HEI and industry and HEI and community project partners takes a lot of coordination and follow-through because,

    when you combine [multiple interdisciplinary courses] and you have a diverse team of direct work experience students putting the whole thing together, and then you have an intern who’s supposed to be managing a process on another end, it was pretty outstanding. It was also a tremendous amount of work. (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017)

Faculty E reported that “one of [her] biggest worries as a professor using PBL was how to constantly obtain new clients and project partners. Many of them came from personal connections or colleagues” (personal communication, March 18, 2016). Likewise, Faculty B expressed the same concern, asserting, “If there were a steady stream [of project partners] being thrown my way then I wouldn’t have to pound the ground” (personal communication, May 3, 2016). Faculty D mentioned that while it was great for faculty to have administrative assistance with things such as vetting clients and managing the details of proposed projects (obtaining basic contact information, communicating expectations and coordinating parking passes as well as
access to buildings), a majority of them remained uneasy about cumbersome reporting and multi-
step approvals because it tends to complicate the process (personal communication, March 18,
2016). On the other hand, without administrative assistance the faculty were left to oversee the
entire process between themselves and the Project Partner, which also caused difficulties.
Faculty C said managing projects and partners “would get a little chaotic because it was just me,
myself, and I. I didn’t really have any other support, but it all worked out” (personal
communication, April 3, 2017). When asked what would have made her job easier, she replied
“it would have been nice to have a co-conspirator” (Faculty C, personal communication, April 3,
2017).

Fortunately, EE&CS stepped in and worked with faculty who established an interest in
seeking partnership; in fact, “many deans and faculty have been supportive of this change and
recognize the benefits of pooling resources” (Administrator, personal communication, March 18,
2016). EE&CS directly engages with businesses and organizations on a day-to-day basis. The
department has the infrastructure and technological ability to steer partners toward the best-fit
EE program, whether it be project-work, internships or employment, in a systemized fashion.
EE&CS manages the internship process for thousands of employers and students per year, and
due to that systems success, they were appointed to construct a three-phased implementation plan
to roll-out the CEE and DEE programs involving intake, assessment, and promotion.

As part of the assessment phase, the temporary JWU subcommittee developed and
piloted an assessment process with intentions to create “structure that is not limiting, but rather
allows [JWU] to leverage collective value of these projects in a way that will help our
admissions team, faculty, students and position the university to continue to be recognized as a
High quality authentic learning “takes extra time and planning on the part of faculty members. Without assessing the outcomes, there is no way to tell if [the] extra effort has been worthwhile” (jwulibrary, n.d.-a, para. 1). In order to have structure and consistency,

it is a bit more work for a faculty member who has been used to doing this all on their own. They know they are doing good things, they know their students are getting benefits, and they might just want to continue to do it that way, but the institution loses the ability to leverage the value of these projects collectively and that does require a bit of processes. (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

Therefore, the Administrator confirmed that the proposed changes will be slow and voluntary. While some faculty continue utilizing variations of PBL outside of the newly created process, others have shown their support and the partnership is headed in a positive direction:

I think what has come easiest is when a faculty member who has [a history of managing PBL], has been so willing and there are several, who have picked up and kind of helped move it through the system because they just get it, love it and want to continue with it. They have taught me a lot about the value of [PBL], when it works best and how to make it a structure that is not going to inhibit the good things that are already happening. In terms of how relationships have grown or changed with faculty, it goes back to this group of faculty who have been running alongside me the whole time. The relationships have gotten nothing but better as we have been able to show them the value that we can bring to this relationship, taking a lot of that burden off of them from an operational stand point so that they can do what they really want to do, work hands-on with their students and partners themselves. (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)
Faculty C declared her interest in having support that assists her with managing partnerships and PBL, however, due to a promotion and service on several committees, she has limited time available to invest in extra-curricular activities. She stated “Doing project work with a community partner is time-consuming. It's rewarding, and I really like it, but I haven't had the bandwidth to get myself organized” (personal communication, April 3, 2017). Faculty C is optimistic for the future, confirming that she “would love to have the next academic year be more structured with what we do here within the Institution” (personal communication, April 3, 2017) in terms of PBL.

**Theme 6: dynamics warranting continued stakeholder engagement.** Many procedural and structural changes have taken place at JWU over the last few years, and the Administrator explained that there are plans in place to continue the elevation of efficiencies related to the “assessment and growth” phases of the CEE and DEE implementation plan (personal communication, March 3, 2017). The stakeholders still have, work to do and most of that work deals with the assessment tools that will be used by students to self-assess their course-embedded experience, by project partners to assess the learning of the student involved, and separately by faculty to assess the learning of the students involved. I think that speaks to the sustainability for this initiative long-term. (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

Recent program assessments have indicated a decline in recorded CEE and DEE participation. The Administrator articulated that those numbers do not provide a true reflection of activity and could have been influenced by the newly structured documentation process, “we have had a slowing down of projects, but they are still happening. Where we might only have 300 involved students this year, in past years which were manually counted, there were records of students in
the thousands” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). To combat this, EE&CS is “setting up a more systematic approach through the University’s assessment software and has made great progress in that. Now we can pull official reports, as opposed to manually counting numbers from an Excel sheet” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

**Systematic change.** In terms of growth, EE&CS is aiming to identify faculty and project partners willing to get involved in the new process. Administrators “have to pledge to ensure that the system we create is not burdensome in a way that it discourages faculty from wanting to participate” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). Further, JWU wants, to capture project success stories to share with faculty and project partners to put their mind at ease that the new process isn’t intended to create more work but rather to increase the University’s ability to celebrate the student learning achieved through these projects. Ultimately this will create interest for faculty and partners to become more intricately involved. Many faculty prefer non-profits which I certainly understand, small businesses and other for-profit organizations within a radius around your campus can also provide valuable projects for students. I am just now getting more familiar with what faculty are doing to identify partners, but in essence your pool or your opportunity for project partners is really robust. (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

As a higher education institution, JWU defines its “brand around experiential education to the point where it becomes [JWU’s] distinguisher or differentiator from our competition” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). In fact, “the [2014] Burke, NSEE, Award, was a pinnacle credential from our peers that we are in fact doing justice to the
experiential education brand that we hold so important to our identity” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). JWU is a solid organization with 100 years of heritage and culture; starting as an uncharted secretarial school, it has advanced to an accredited, world-class University grounded by the same mission and guiding principles across four campuses (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-a). The University prides itself on “academic excellence, student selectivity and affordability — while strengthening [its] organizational and financial foundation” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-c), and continues to adapt to changing times, particularly the demands of industry by embedding EE throughout the curriculum in a variety of formats.

The participants referred to PBL as a strategic advantage with the likelihood to differentiate HEI. In consonance,

there are so many possibilities that we have not even begun to explore. The growth potential from a student perspective, a faculty perspective, a project perspective, a project partner perspective, and even from a departmental perspective, this could someday be just right there next to internships. What is our tomorrow, the progressiveness, the cycle of connecting them? (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

Each of the participants is a seasoned professional with years of practical experience; the data suggested that when faculty are able to incorporate their industry know-how into classroom and service settings it makes JWU’s education unique (catalog, about jwu, para. 2). As illustrated when EE&CS began working closely with faculty to develop an industry-relevant DEE program that,

focused on creating financial modeling with University investment dollars given to our finance students to invest on behalf of the institution. Each term nine students are selected from a group of up to twenty students [enrolled in the DEE] who become interns,
who take the financial modeling strategy created by the DEE students and start implementing it into a simulation software to prove out whether these selections will have a positive or negative impact. (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

Together, EE&CS and the faculty have successfully cycled these integrated programs through multiple terms, with plans for it to happen well into the future. There are also on-going conversations of expanding this model to other disciplines on campus as well. The Administrator said this specific model, has become something that I feel great affinity for because I was involved from the beginning. The faculty reached out to me and asked me for my help on this. I provided suggestions and opportunities for what they were trying to do. As a result of those conversations, myself and the faculty created this DEE course outline, we went through the curriculum committee together to get it approved. The department chair was involved. There was such a great collaboration and appreciation. (personal communication, March 3, 2017)

The success of this partnership and program proves that if JWU “creatively worked toward PBL, [the University has] the potential to unite theory with practice in a way that stands out as the gold standard” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). JWU is fortunate that, we don't have to support things that a lot of other universities support. We don't have the baggage that other universities and colleges have gathered over decades if not longer, of hair splitting work on nothing important. It is important to know how language affects meaning, it is, but when people have done study, upon study, upon study, of this guy’s, guys of that guy’s study of how language effects meaning, then they just want to hear
themselves talk and read papers at conferences. They’re talking about nothing important. (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016).

Faculty C stated that in comparison with a traditional research university, there are a few common drawbacks of teaching universities such as larger course loads and lack of teaching assistants or fellows. She mentioned that while there are some creative ways to integrate relevant projects and technology into her work; resources can be limited and posed challenges making it difficult to include non-required elements.

JWU supports administrators and faculty with the freedom to explore various education models that focus on solving practical issues to make a difference in the world. As far as “looking at our challenges and successes, my strategy or advice to other schools would be to have a collaborative committee as opposed to one department, proposing or building a system [to embed EE in the classroom]” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

Developing partnership processes that permit stakeholder groups to work across internal and external boundaries broadens the perspective while widening resources to collectively accomplish managing PBL to design, implement, assess and sustain programs.

SCCRI lives by its mission and with the provision of resources from external stakeholders has demonstrated great strides to guide the organization steadily in the direction of its vision; however, its fate relies on the support of the community. A tremendous help has been PBL’s role in connecting “students and schools with communities and the real world” (Buck Institute for Education, n.d.-b, para. 8). Such phenomena “require questioning of the individuals involved in order to delve deeply into relational perceptions” (Higgins, 2015, p. 47), which gave reason for this case study and its use of ST. The JWU Faculty Members and students have offered hours of professional and para-professional project work, some of which have
contributed directly to financial sourcing through grant writing. RWU’s CPC, along with enrolled students, have invested a semesters worth of work, and RISD has made some significant investments in the situation as well from direct student involvement and financial donations.

During data collection, it was mentioned that JWU Faculty Members and SCCRI were in active communication with RISD to discuss possibilities for future collaboration. Understanding the unique perspectives and operations of several stakeholders is a complex task because “multiple project strategies are unfolding at one time alongside each other but communicating the coordination, boundaries, and behind-the-scenes linkages is not always clear” (ArtPlace, 2016b, para. 1). Though challenging, Faculty A found the process to clarification to be gratifying and stated,

One of the things we've learned [through cross-collaboration] is that the beauty of this is when you get into that kind of relationship, say you have a couple of faculty involved and a couple of different students involved, we all make assumptions about one another. I make assumptions about what it's like to teach a design class, just like the design class probably has assumptions about how to teach a marketing class. Then when we get into it and work together we realize that, boy, our assumptions are really wrong. (personal communication, March 28, 2017)

The Faculty Members conveyed that it is no easy feat to organize people and systematic processes in a way that contributes to systemic change, but it is essential that HEI engage in collaborative efforts with stakeholders if they want to continue attracting students, producing employable graduates and imparting an ethical legacy with lasting impact.

**Systemic change.** Regarding the big picture, Faculty B briefly explained the history of the education system and emphasized how employment was generally a system indicative of
social class; there was a separation between the world of laborers and the elite. In many cases, laborers were born into trades and were educated through observation and practice. Therefore, “education in that sense, a traditional sense, was not for most of the stone cutters people” (personal communication, May 3, 2016). In comparison, high class society was composed of privileged people and destined toward a more formal education system. These elite groups had the advantage of plentiful resources such as social networks, time and money; for example, “Socrates sat in a living room with a bunch of guys, they trotted down the cobblestones with a bed sheet on one shoulder and talked about the important things about the day; maybe had a glass of wine. Then they went home at night when they were tired of it and the next day they did it all over again” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016), whereas the laborers were focused on getting the job done out of necessity for themselves as well as their community. Generally, this group did not have the luxury to “sit around all day having a symposium, sitting on somebody’s couch drinking” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016).

Faculty B shared these examples to demonstrate the difference in the outcomes between stakeholders focusing efforts on day-to-day minutia versus substantial productivity, noting that some people “are just inventing a problem in order to solve it, while there are people are starving in the world” (personal communication, May 3, 2016). Faculty B continued making the point that partnerships in support of alternative teaching methods can be equally, if not more, productive than traditional education structures. She explained, “In the universities they were writing volume after volume after volume, splitting hairs about what goes on inside of Gods head” and meanwhile, “somebody else [unaffiliated with the education system] did an interdisciplinary project; this involves design, mathematics, architecture, business communication, sociology, religion, all these disciplines united in concert to create [the Grand
Faculty B clarified that the workplace has evolved drastically in the last century, more particularly in the last 25 years since the inception and increased reliance on the internet, and that, as a result, “we have gone so far ahead of the changes that we’re in a different literacy field” (personal communication, May 3, 2016) compared to current students. Nevertheless, she notes that the classroom does not reflect this evolution, stating, “We know that higher education is changing; it is all we talk about, but the structure we are using are from the past times” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). Faculty A shared a similar opinion, pointing out that “in the last 50, 60 years, higher ed. has not changed at all really, relatively speaking. It's changed some, but has not changed at the rate of, say, Moore's Law” (personal communication, March 28, 2017). If a majority of the current teaching styles reflect how students were educated before people had easy accessibility to information and knowledge, then “why is [traditional lecture-style teaching] still the [primary] model?” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). Faculty B claimed that it is crucial for educators to “have a sense of the world our students are entering, which is not the world that we, of my generation were entering when we finished college” (personal communication, May 3, 2016). Therefore, “higher education needs to catch up to the real world and we really need to look at what our equation is when it comes to bridging the gap between what we do and what could be helped in the community” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017). For example,

what [HEI] need to be doing is looking at what's working, what's going on in the world.

The Nikes, the Googles, the Apples, they're not perfect, but some of these great
organizations that have moved up the ladder, the IKEAs, the whole bunch of them, they have a sense of community. They have engagement. They not only compete, but they have a sense of the environment. They have sustainability, and the people who work for them are committed. (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017)

Faculty B stated that JWU is “a hidden asset” (personal communication, May 3, 2016) with extensive possibilities. Potential exists in redefining how stakeholders work across disciplines as well as institutions to develop interconnected partnerships and educational programs that “take advantage of the assets that [institutions] have” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017) because,

there's so much choice today. [The United States has approximately] 4,500 business schools. How do you choose which one to go to? It's going to be the ones with the best reputations. It's not just the reputation from the past, but the reputation of the future of what it means to come to an institution and spend your hard earned money to learn amongst other people. (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017)

As a result of the current landscape in higher education such as falling enrollment, competition, and rising costs, institutions have an opportunity to ensure future success and sustainability by being proactive. The participants expressed that the adaptability of institutions based on external demands was highly important for the relevance of higher education in the world.

A long-time JWU professor, referred to as “Faculty G”, stated that culinary arts and hospitality have been “JWU’s bread & butter” (personal communication, July 12, 2017) and suggested that the University “re-define [our brand], so that it is not limited to a specific industry, but an inclusive strategy across all disciplines. Personally, I loved when our slogan was America’s Career University” (personal communication, July, 12, 2017) because it was easy to
understand and made it clear that JWU was focused on preparing students for employment. Further, “Experiential education used to be our niche, but we are losing it. We still have it, but we don’t market it like we used to” (Faculty G, personal communication, July, 12, 2017). Faculty A declared that it is “the people [and the organizations] that have vision who are gonna dictate the future. Those are gonna be the ones that survive in the end” (personal communication, March 28, 2017). Likewise, longer-term strategic relationships or partnerships or strategic opportunities could mean from an institutional perspective that every student graduates from [JWU] with at least one project-based experience. That is a big task, but there is value in visioning and creating a vision for what we want this to be from a more comprehensive level.

(Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

**Theme 7: dedication to reimagining the delivery of education.** Universities “must unite theory and practice” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). Participants uniformly articulated the criticality of practical education and vowed their support of authentic learning within curricula; more specifically, the Administrator stated “Experiential education is taking the content knowledge from the classroom that is learned and gained and applying it in real life situations that allow a student to live and explore their capacity and gain insight into where they need more work, and more focus” (personal communication, March 3, 2017). Faculty B said “People recognize that the richness of communities goes in multiple directions, and the fact that universities can provide everything, everywhere and have the ability to take things everywhere” magnifies their role in supporting change (personal communication, May 3, 2017). As such, Faculty A recommended turning community issues into the focus of coursework as a possible solution to better society (personal communication, March 28, 2017). With PBL,
“students discover a different dimension of their learning beyond a syllabus and a textbook, and much of that learning comes with really collaborating with people that you really didn't know at all prior to the project. I think any time you can get out of the classroom is invaluable” (Faculty C, personal communication, April 3, 2017).

**Progressive education.** The data implied that a dramatic shift in the way that the industry and education systems work as far as preparing students for job opportunities available is indispensable; the participants advised that graduates need social, theoretical, transferable and technical skills to flourish. To elaborate,

I just find our typical classroom as it stands now, it's not very energizing. There's a board. There's chairs. There's fluorescent lights. There's a lecture. I'm not saying that the lecture doesn't have value, but I'm just saying that there's other modes of learning that can be just as valuable. When [students] get out into the community [where they] have decided to spend the next four years of [their] life, I think it's so important that [students] know the community. (Faculty C, personal communication, April 3, 2017)

Furthermore, Faculty B explained how all students should have experiences in learning environments to teach them how to collaborate and problem solve in diverse groups (personal communication, May 3, 2016); the practicality of education should reflect these transformations because “universities don’t have information to give as a product anymore in exchange for mega debt” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). Faculty B argued that universities have the power to redefine the student experience and enrich student engagement: “Our product is this, experiential education. It is not handing over information; it is teaching students what to do with the information when they [graduate]” (personal communication, May 3, 2016).
Although, project-based education has been around; it is really gaining some momentum. There are many institutions that are way ahead in that area, there are others just jumping on board now, and others that just don’t get the influence of that type of relationship. That structure in a classroom can provide students with the opportunity to gain those real-world skills and experiences that can make them a higher potential candidate.

(Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

The data confirmed that inter-organizational collaboration through PBL is a practical and meaningful way for stakeholders, especially students, to learn. Regardless of “whether [projects are] in the class or not, these students get the opportunity to practice soft skills, to collaborate with teammates, to demonstrate professionalism, to problem-solve in ways that certainly will resonate with employers after graduation” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). When asked what the Administrator liked most about collaboratively managing PBL, the reply was:

[It] broadens the conversation about experiential education. Experiential education is much more than internship, and by putting momentum behind course-embedded experiential education we are actually creating a broader umbrella. I see our students getting great substance in their courses that then lead to courses that have projects embedded in them, which then lead to projects themselves that become courses with small groups of students and working with partners who end up hiring these students as interns. Many of which are then getting job offers at these same companies. For me, it is a spectrum or a scope, or umbrella of experiential education that course-embedded brings us closer to. (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)
Faculty B asserted that PBL is not the only answer for improving education and skills; it is not a one size fits all, but it is “ideally suited” for many disciplines, and the skills are transferable to various environments (personal communication, May 3, 2016). To further convey this point, the Administrator said “When you are producing high-level graduates who are work-ready, career-ready, industry-ready, then experiential education is a great method for universities to embed into student learning experiences” (personal communication, March 3, 2017).

During the second observation session, before Faculty D arrived, a majority of teams were working together to finalize details to make sure all material was accounted for and ready to be presented. Meanwhile, a pair of students were overheard discussing preparation. One said “My group is ready” (personal observation, March 20, 2017), and the other replied, “I hate group work, so I’m working by myself” (personal observation, March 20, 2017). Although there appeared to be some flexibility in the team structure, it was later confirmed by Faculty D that students would be required to work collaboratively in groups because independent projects were not an option for this specific course, as the student population was enrolled in majors that were not “solitary industry pursuits” (personal communication, March 21, 2017).

In this particular course, students were graded on individual and group performance (not character or any other factors). To mirror the workplace, grades represented money; an employee gets paid based on output and how accountable they are separately as well as part of a team, and the same principle was applied in this course. Upon arrival, the faculty member was energetic and friendly, and addressed every student by his or her first name. The faculty member passed out index cards, each inscribed with the student’s name on it and a date for each of the class sessions. Upon further review, the index card’s purpose was to track class participation. It was an honor system, and as the students asked questions, provided insight and offered
suggestions, they would record a checkmark and pass the index card in at the end of each class. As a result of this system, a student said, “I’m more motivated to participate because I have a visual that reminds me to” (personal communication, March 21, 2017). As Faculty D walked around to answer burning questions, she encouraged the students by saying, “You guys are on top of it” (personal communication, March 21, 2017), and a student responded with, “Well then we get a check then right?” (personal communication, March 21, 2017), “You sure do!” replied Faculty D (personal communication, March 21, 2017). They were laughing, but overall the students appeared to be enthusiastic about the point system in place for participation and completion of objectives.

Throughout the observation sessions, students also appeared eager to be participating in a course with actual stakes regarding an authentic organization. One student commented, “The unpredictability keeps me motivated to stay on course. You have to go to class or you will fall behind” (personal observation, March 21, 2017). A group of students all agreed that the collaborative style is anything but boring; it is engaging, but you have to try since “D’s don’t get degrees” (personal communication, March 20, 2017) as another student added. Faculty D said,

While some students might say ‘I hate doing group projects’, I'm like ‘[embrace real-world experience] because you will need to do this when you go out there. You won't sit in your disciplinary silo doing an individual project and get paid for it. You have to work with other people’. (personal communication, March 20, 2017)

In agreement, Faculty A asserted that he “would stop siloing students from day one. I would say, why put all the marketing students together? Cross-pollinate everybody” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017).
**Curriculum innovation.** A shift from a traditional “siloed” (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017) approach to a cross-functional and experiential culture was suggested by the data. To change and make progress, Faculty A said, “We have to reimagine the delivery of education. We have to reimagine it. We have to sit down and say, what's it gonna look like in 10 years?” (personal communication, March 28, 2017). Participants predicted the future will involve EE and collaborative partnerships:

This kind of learning is so deep and so broad, and so strong that its more likely to be sustainable. You compare this to students taking a test, and the processes that they go through to take a test versus the processes the student go through to prepare a project or product. Which of those processes are more sustainable? Which of those go deeper into the student? An overused quote is ‘give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime’, and I think experiential education is one of the strongest ways to learn. It is going to benefit our students not only up until graduation, but in whatever they choose to do; not only five years out, but ten years out, and throughout their entire professional career. (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

The Administrator and Faculty Members reported that the transferable and meaningful learning that takes place during PBL goes beyond class content, and that hands-on experience is helping to shape students as individuals and professionals not just for the class, but for their future as well; “you can't get that from reading a text book, you have to face it” (Project Partner, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

Faculty B asserted that obtaining in-the-moment projects require working with project partners, and “if you look at the literature in community-based and service learning, you see
constant treatment of partners as a critical factor” (personal communication, May 3, 2016). To explain,

I see more and more partners being interested not only in participating in these projects, but also supporting Johnson & Wales in other ways, to enable us to continue providing this real, high-touch marketing method. I don't know what that means in terms of support besides being project partners, but I could see companies in industry that value the concept of experiential education and project-based education in a way that we become appealing to them and they would want to be connected in some way to that learning model. (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

Participants expressed the importance of partnerships; Faculty B forecasted that “universities aren’t going to survive without projects or our kind of pedagogies (experiential education). We need projects” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). Equally, the Project Partner stated he needs supporters, whom he has attracted by putting “the structure and programs in place” to show that SCCRI can sustain itself (personal communication, March 6, 2017), but would advance its mission and purpose more rapidly with their assistance. Partners are more willing to invest in something when they see long-term potential and “long-term benefits to the community that they want to support” (Project Partner, personal communication, March 6, 2017). While the Faculty Members claimed PBL can be implemented in the absence of project partners, Faculty B contended that,

You want [students] to walk into the real world prepared and they do that with our supervision and our guidance, by people who have lived in it and have done it before. Students are at a huge advantage if they have gained some practice. (personal communication, May 3, 2016)
In the absence of project partners, “it feels something's missing even though I do meet the course objectives. It is more work, but it does bring a different dimension [to learning]” (Faculty C, personal communication, April 3, 2017).

Supply and demand. The participants agreed that innovative and practical education should be openly explored by stakeholders instead of resisted and “one of the many ways that Johnson & Wales has been ahead of the curve is we bring in industry experts. We partner with business and our professors” (Brouillard, 2013, p. 22) to collaborate on how to adopt or modify curriculum to match industry and student demand. Employers have expectations of how college-educated employees should perform; “industry favors [authentic learning], they drive it, they want it, they want graduates with the ability to adapt to environments in which decisions have to be made and choices have to be made” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017). Employers presume graduates possess independence and are capable of applying critical thinking to complex situations, and that “this is what having a college degree means” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). Moreover,

Industry tells us that the more experience a graduate has, then the more appealing they are because it means they have already had the opportunity to test out what they know. Industry is basically telling us they demand experience from recent college grads, so that certainly influences institutions to pay attention to experiential education as a concept of learning. (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

Faculty B also provided an example of collaboratively managed PBL and its relevance to the workforce: “If you sit in an office and say ‘we are clueless, tell us what to do?’ it will not sit well with an employer” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). Employment,
doesn’t mean you walk in and sit down and somebody says ‘now honey here is step one and step two’, in the perfect order, and ‘I will check it after you are done, okay honey’.

And, so ‘you go do the first step and sit in the sandbox with your shovel. Then the other kids will come and dig one hole and I’ll come look to see if its dug right and then we can go to the next step’. (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016)

The participant gave the impression that organizations pay employees or recent graduates to figure it out because employers are not going to do the work for employees; students pay for formal education that will teach them how to use critical thinking to solve problems. Employees will be held accountable for their own actions and should only check in with their managers when they have already considered many options and can present their reasoning with support and rationale. Therefore, Faculty D claims to operate her courses under those same expectations.

An enrolled student in Faculty D’s course confirmed these expectations, “The professor made it clear on the first day that we are responsible for the outcome of the deliverables. Our grades are based on the client’s satisfaction, so you get out what you put in” (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Observation backed the idea that PBL allows students to champion their path of learning while gaining realistic experience through the process. Likewise, a JWU student said, “[PBL] is really, really good; we should start earlier. They should restructure the curriculum” (personal observation, March 20, 2017). Another student exclaimed that she was pleasantly surprised that the course engaged her in work that involved on-site investigation with a non-profit project partner. The other students agreed and pointed out that “The course description said that it involved experiential education, but no one ever reads all of the details of required courses” (personal observation, March 20, 2017). These courses are “much more interactive. You aren’t
getting babysat or just showing up and getting a grade. This is important; this is real college!” (personal communication, March 20, 2017). A student who had previously participated in a project-based course with Faculty D replied, “That is the reason I picked it again; it’s like an internship but you get to report back to the class and have faculty support throughout the learning experience” (personal observation, March 20, 2017).

**Inclusiveness.** An authentic project approach with project partners “can give the good students something to do that is meaningful and help the struggling students to get on board” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). The quality and enthusiasm of students working on projects vary. For instance, some students are “as serious as a heart attack,” such as this one girl who “had done such a wonderful job you would have thought she was a professional. She took it seriously, and there was no half-stepping”, while others “just put their name on the project and you never see them” (Project Partner, personal communication, March 6, 2017). Based on the Project Partner’s experience, he put forward the idea that engagement issues are common in many team-based environments, whether in college or in the workplace; nevertheless, there seemed to be value in pairing students at opposite ends of the commitment spectrum because: “Sometimes [those students less dedicated] hang around the smart [and highly involved] kids, so maybe some things rubbed off, you never know what they picked up on. Maybe they brought them up a little bit, maybe they saw how the other students just took charge” (personal communication, March 6, 2017). Scheidler (2015) has observed PBL as a strategy to bridge gaps between high-achieving and struggling students as well.

The Faculty Members suggested that the opportunity for students to learn how to assimilate to submissive, assertive and even aggressive members, while balancing diverse skill-sets, aligns well with field expectations. However, students may not truly understand the
importance of progressive education. Faculty B indicated that some students might devalue PBL because “it’s messy, [and] its unpredictable” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016). Throughout the education system, students “have been taught that they should sit in rows and are told what to do” (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016) and as a result they do not anticipate change and ultimately find it difficult to adjust. For example,

I have had organizations change leadership mid-project, it happened last term and I have had it happened in the past. ‘Oh my god Professor, the executive director we started working with is no longer with the organization and another lady is there emailing us’ (imitating a student). I say ‘hallelujah!’ You have an authentic situation. You go to work out there in the professional environment, you will make contracts with a company they will be your client and this will happen. I rejoice that the lady sent an email to the students and I didn't have to go looking for her. It’s like she came out of the woodwork before I even knew the old executive director left. I'm like sweet! Because a whole lot of other situations happen where the manager of the project has to do a lot more leg work. ‘Guys get on board, your client changed; it’s authentic’. (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2016)

The Faculty Members and Project Partner mentioned that it appears some students want an easy grade without the extensive work required to enter their chosen fields. Participants suggested that students assume work will always be chronological and orderly,

Students tend to think organization means chapter by chapter through a text book. Being walked through a text book with slides from the publisher. The instructor says ‘this is chapter one, these are the notes, they are posted on ulearn’; then chapter two, chapter three, chapter, [hesitates] ‘hey we skipped chapter four’ [student voice]. ‘It’s okay, we
Faculty B said she sometimes starts with chapter 18 in her class, as long as it makes sense with the information being discussed at the time. She suggested that the format does not have to be logical in terms of how the author wrote the text; instead, it can be ordered according to relevance. In opposition to this approach, Faculty B noted that the course evaluations from student’s enrolled in these courses have on occasion stated otherwise, but still she argued that the course is organized in accordance with a project-based style typical of industry (personal communication, May 3, 2016).

Summary

Chapter 4 presented a summary of the findings of this study. This included a description of the partnership and participants in this study along with the themes that emerged from the data.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

A theoretical and practical misalignment in cultivating workplace readiness and global citizenship in students exists because partnerships are not being optimized between stakeholders. The purpose of this descriptive case study was to understand the long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization by describing the interactions and influences of stakeholder engagement. This chapter explains how the research questions, the literature, and the theoretical framework contributed to and informed the researcher’s interpretation of the findings. Research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

The central research question:

- How do a university and a non-profit organization engage in partnership to collaboratively manage project-based learning (PBL)?

The sub-questions:

- What is the nature of the partnership?
- What purpose does an inter-organizational arrangement serve?

Data was collected and analyzed from three sources: document review, five semi-structured interviews and two observation sessions. Emergent data was cross-referenced to the various sources across participant groups and resulted in seven themes, as reported in Chapter 4. Upon further investigation of those results, the themes were reduced to three conclusions, as presented in Table 1: (A) stakeholder alignment deepens engagement by increasing the longevity of partnership and maximizing the reach of impact; (B) the effectiveness of partnership is enhanced when resources are shared within the university and across the non-profit organization; and (C) faculty are the driving force of pedagogical change and are central to the sustainability of partnership.
Table 1

*Presentation of Key Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Stakeholder alignment</td>
<td>A. Stakeholder alignment deepens engagement by increasing the longevity of partnership and maximizing the reach of impact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Engagement as a result of individual interests and organizational commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Central Research Question:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Characteristics of stakeholders that contribute to the cohesiveness of partnership</td>
<td></td>
<td>How do a university and a non-profit organization engage in partnership to collaboratively manage project-based learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. System-wide support</td>
<td></td>
<td>First sub-question:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Reciprocity of interconnected stakeholders</td>
<td>B. The effectiveness of partnership is enhanced when resources are shared within the university and across the non-profit organization</td>
<td>What is the nature of the partnership?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dynamics warranting continued stakeholder engagement</td>
<td>C. Faculty are the driving force of pedagogical change and are central to the sustainability of partnership</td>
<td>Second sub-question:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Dedication to reimagining the delivery of education</td>
<td></td>
<td>What purpose does an inter-organizational arrangement serve?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The key findings are justified based on the themes presented in Chapter 4. Supported by empirical evidence contextualized by the literature and the theoretical framework employed in this study, this chapter discusses the meaning and significance of the conclusions made based on the research findings to better understand the long-term engagement between stakeholders. Further, Chapter 5 details the implications for theory, the implications for practice, and the implications for research, as well as the limitations and a final conclusion of the overall study.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

There are many uniting forces in this case comprised of the primary stakeholders; from Johnson & Wales University (JWU): faculty, academic deans, Experiential Education & Career Services (EE&CS), executive leadership and students; from Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island (SCCRI): The executive director (Project Partner), the assistant to the Project Partner, as well as SCCRI tenants; and The Rhode Island community; and secondary stakeholders including the Rhode Island government, grant and financial investors, neighborhood associations, industry, employers and locally affiliated HEI. The stakeholders in this case collaborate to organize and facilitate “real life credit bearing learning experiences at or involving community organizations, intentionally designed to achieve academic and/or professional learning outcomes, as well as assist in the student’s civic and personal development” (jwulibrary, n.d.-c, para. 1).

The interlocking organizational structures and operational processes of how a university and non-profit organization engage in partnership to collaboratively manage PBL as understood by the researcher are outlined below:

**Role of administrators.** EE&CS administrators collaborated with academic affairs and faculty to establish a revised course description for Directed Experiential Education (DEE) programs and guidelines for incorporating Course-embedded Experiential Education (CEE) into
an existing course. This included the development of eligibility requirements for students and project partners. EE&CS partners with faculty to identify projects that meet DEE and CEE qualifiers (JWU Careers, 2017). With that structure in place, the standard process is then for EE&CS to receive a project proposal from a potential partner through an electronic application form submitted through the University’s website. This happens on a rolling basis throughout the year, preferably four to six months prior to the term. The next step involves approval of the project; EE&CS evaluates the application from the project partner to assure that there is enough content to pass it to the dean of the appropriate academic area for decision making. Sometimes this process is obvious and directly associated with a major or discipline, and other times it is interdisciplinary and could involve multiple deans and academic areas. Once the information is triaged, project needs are compared to internal resources and goals (Johnson & Wales University, 2017). For instance, the dean or deans approve the project depending on its value to students, alignment with course objectives and available faculty. When a project is freestanding such as an independent study outside of standard coursework, then faculty are compensated, so there are financial considerations as well. If and when approved, the project is passed to the interested faculty to manage the remainder of the partnership and process. Upon completion of the term, EE&CS reports on student, faculty and project partner experiences as well as program outcomes.

EE&CS administrators handle intake, processing, and assessment, while the academic dean(s) approve the project and select the most appropriate faculty for the partnership. Currently, the responsibility of sourcing project partners varies between faculty, academic administrators, EE&CS and in some cases students. The hope of the Administrator is to minimize the faculty involvement in the administrative processes required so that they can focus
on the student learning. The systematic process of tracking and reporting experiences requires the engagement of stakeholders through the provision of structure, open-dialog and support. This way the performance of the partnership and program can be solidified and promoted to enhance integration between applicable stakeholders.

**Role of faculty.** Faculty assist with integrating real-world projects into the curriculum (jwulibrary, n.d.-c). They communicate with the academic administrator(s) leading their unit (program, major, school, college, campus, etc.) to convey interest in taking on project proposals. Once the proposal is accepted, faculty oversee the day-to-day management of PBL, and develop as well as sustain strategic alliances with project partners. Facilitation is comprised of designing assignments, requirements, and benchmarks; implementing PBL and acclimating students to the process; expediting the course; collaborating with students and project partners; assessing and providing ongoing guidance and feedback, including submitting grades to students and outcomes to EE&CS; and finally reflecting and improving the engagement process with stakeholders. Participants suggested that faculty are ultimately responsible for creating the learning opportunities through PBL. Therefore, the faculty role is to develop sound materials that accomplish the course objectives; they are free to design lesson plans as part of the overall curriculum as long as they abide by the established objectives approved by the curriculum committee and associated administration.

**Role of project partners.** Project partners identify project needs and submit an application to administrators to provide background for the project. Upon approval, the project partners cooperate with administrators, faculty and students to exchange information and keep all stakeholders up to date on the status of the project. Project partners engage students in authentic opportunities to learn, offer ongoing feedback and mentorship, and critique project performance.
Depending on the scope of the project, timing, and faculty expectations, the involvement between the project partner and the other stakeholders fluctuates. For example, partners may or may not attend student meetings, provide business information (some of which may be confidential or proprietary), and participate in presentations (Johnson & Wales University, 2017). In long-term engagements involving continuous project-work, it is common for partners to meet with students off campus to acquaint themselves, exchange information and ideas, as well as on campus for project initiation and/or final presentations.

**Role of students.** Students commit to engage, plan and produce tangible work in line with the expectations set by the university, administrators, faculty and project partners. More so, the student’s role in this partnership is being open to learning that is not going to be spoon-fed. It is not easy, or the typical mold. They have to be a willing and active participant in this model in order to individually and collectively gain the benefits.

(Administrator, March 3, 2017)

Depending on the course structure, students select or faculty provide projects with associated partners. Students collaborate with classmates, project partners and faculty to conduct research, brainstorm solutions, report progress, reflect, and evaluate their experience. To that end, “students utilize course material (or knowledge related to their major) and apply course- or major-related skills to address a need presented by a nonprofit or a social entrepreneurship venture” (jwulibrary, n.d.-c, para. 6).

PBL programs and university stakeholders connect students to field-based learning opportunities that “deepen students’ academic experiences” (Cooper, Schwartzkopff, Moradsky, Keeley, Aldaham & Robinson, 2013) while also better preparing them to meet workforce qualifications (Grant et al., 2010). This study found that higher education courses which are
compatible with the function of local non-profit organizations have expansive possibility to interface efforts for mutual gain and collective value for a wide range of stakeholders.

**Conclusion A: Stakeholder Alignment Deepens Engagement by Increasing the Longevity of Partnership and Maximizing the Reach of Impact**

The data showed that the stakeholders engage by initiating and sustaining long-term partnerships with compatible organizations. The Faculty Members reported that while they occasionally work with various project partners on smaller, or even one-time projects, as a result of the extensive alignment between JWU and SCCRI, those projects take priority; the participants claimed that they consistently communicated with each other to determine individual and collective goals, convening where they overlap. Managing PBL across stakeholder groups was found to substantiate learning outcomes and organizational objectives, while also improving the local community through direct engagement. This conclusion revealed that while shorter-term partnerships required less alignment from stakeholders, consistent and longer-term engagement called for considerable alignment of partners in areas of philosophical approach, business strategy and personal appeal.

**Philosophical approach.** In terms of inter-organizational collaboration, the findings revealed that the greatest influential factor of long-term partnership between the stakeholders was similarity in philosophy, such as (a) vision, potential and possibilities for the future (continuous improvement, diversity and inclusion); (b) mission or purpose and what it takes to achieve that vision (education, collaboration and leadership); (c) values, ethical principles and commitments, and individual and organizational beliefs about what really matters and how work should be carried out (civic engagement, community impact, ethical responsibility); (d) goals, aspirations and desired results (growth). As a result of JWU and SCCRI sharing similar
characteristics and agreeing on overarching philosophical approaches, collaboration appeared smoother and extended the life of the partnership. Aside from philosophy, the next influential factor fostering long-term engagement was the alignment of business strategy.

**Business strategy.** The process of partnership between JWU and SCCRI was relatively informal to start, and gradually became more formal in its organization as the stakeholder groups continued collaboration. Partnerships were extended when the involved stakeholder groups were able to align the focus of business for both of the organizations as well as their individual roles with each other to integrate resources. The decade-long strategic partnership between JWU and SCCRI was nurtured by the dedication of administrators, faculty, the Project Partner and students. The alignment, interconnected resources and investment of the stakeholders, both individually and as groups, have allowed them to collectively develop inclusive programs, manage projects and improve partnership processes. The participants insisted that inter-organizational collaboration appealed to them because aligning stakeholders and resources expanded the reach of impact.

The data uncovered that the enhanced learning of students was an influential factor that encouraged the partnership between JWU and SCCRI to manage PBL. Findings confirmed that SE and collaborative management of PBL between partners offered a synergistic approach that provided the opportunity of unified application between theory and practical experience, resulting in enhanced student learning. Students gained skills and experience by being exposed to an assortment of learning situations that enhanced their candidacy for employment. JWU’s strategy from an operational perspective allows the CEE and DEE program structure and policies to transcend a single partnership and be duplicated across the institution. Moreover, administrators continue working internally with faculty to enhance the terms and conditions of
partnership and programs going forward. SCCRI is dedicated to strengthening partnerships with local HEI and organizations that assist with improving their program performance and overall operations (Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, n.d.-e).

**Personal appeal.** Participant responses showed limited variance as far as each participants influences to engage in partnership, pointing first to student experience, then community impact and intrinsic reward. The Faculty Members and the Project Partner professed their deep-rooted passion for connecting with the local community, and the Administrator endorsed it as a favorable option to carry out PBL. Additionally, stakeholders who accomplished course objectives and program outcomes in a realistic and practical way were found to be intrinsically rewarded. Participants referenced meaningful work as a strong influence of their engagement to collaboratively manage PBL. The findings suggested that even though steeper investments were made in initiating and sustaining PBL partnerships and programs, facilitators had greater job satisfaction because the program and project results were meaningful. Each of the stakeholders emanated the importance of relationships and exuded interest in his or her work. To illustrate, Faculty B shared that for many years she has believed in the value of university/community partnerships in which students gain valuable authentic educational experience, while helping local non-profit organizations complete needed work. In her view, partnerships between universities and non-profit organizations are a win-win reciprocally beneficial situation (personal communication, March 21, 2017).

**Complications.** Even though PBL was found to have many advantages, research findings exposed the existent roadblocks that hindered the success of partnerships. A few disadvantages of collaboration included time consumption and constraints, dual loyalty issues, as well as differences in ethical and operational standards of the stakeholders.
Time consumption and constraints. The Faculty Members associated traditional education with predictability and operationally efficient practices. In comparison, PBL has a lot of uncertainty, but was said to result in superior learning because students are actively engaged. Nevertheless, even when facilitators were able to assimilate to a new teaching style, the findings showed that PBL with project partners required more work, time and steady commitment of the involved stakeholders. The data explained that at times faculty felt overwhelmed by adding more items to and already full agenda. On the contrary, it was discovered that the process was less exertive and more operative than taking the time and resources to invent assignments that would achieve each of the course outcomes. While the study demonstrated that concerns were more prevalent during initial buy-in and implementation phases of change, as novelty diminished over time projects and partnerships became more standardized and easier to manage.

In spite of foreseen and unforeseen challenges, Faculty C claimed PBL was a valuable learning experience for all involved stakeholders (personal communication, April 3, 2017). Nonetheless, it seemed that as a result of unpredictability, investment and support, the participants felt that other faculty tended to be cautious when establishing new teaching methods, courses and partnerships. Although PBL partnerships remained a priority for the Faculty Members in this case, on occasion the large class sizes and heavy workloads left them feeling apprehensive because of the commitment required.

Another constraint was that project timelines did not always match the academic term calendar. Faculty A concurred that academia is driven by infrastructure needs and planning schedules so far in advance does not always work with other key stakeholder groups. He stated that considerable lead times were often detrimental to the quick changes commonly demanded by PBL. This was one advantage found in the longer-term established partnership between JWU
and SCCRI, in that the stakeholders were more willing to adjust timelines in a way that worked for everyone involved.

**Dual loyalty.** The findings showed that when various partners came together, each dedicated to a slightly different cause, competing deadline issues with coordination materialized. Dual loyalty in this context was related to the role conflict present when stakeholders had to choose where to concentrate their efforts between two distinct areas of interest, such as learning versus project management and innovation versus administration. This explanation suggested that while advantageous, managing the learning process while also providing appropriate projects across student groups within the administrative constraints of at least two organizations can be complicated. The participants mentioned experiencing frequent interruptions in collaboration due to competing responsibilities as well as the inherent short-term nature of projects synced to academic timelines.

**Standard differences.** Findings conveyed that the incompatibility of ethical and operational standards had the potential to impede the success of PBL across stakeholder groups. For instance, there was an industry-experienced JWU Professor referred to as “Faculty F”, who decided to test out PBL for the first time. At one point in the project, students from different disciplines were faced with a disagreement. Faculty F wanted to solve it for the students, instead of allowing them to work it out among themselves, which is an inherent advantage of authentic learning. The Project Partner interpreted this as an illogicality and did not think that Faculty F saw it as a learning tool, more so a teaching tool. In other words, the Project Partner felt that Faculty F had based the lesson on his expertise rather than providing the students with an opportunity to learn how to deal with conflict and resolve it in a way that allows them to grow professionally (personal communication, March 6, 2017).
In contrast, there was another occasion when JWU students saw things from different perspectives and were in disagreement, but instead the professor in this case recognized the opportunity of the authentic situation and required that the students utilize critical thinking in order to come to a fair compromise. After the students had come to an agreement, the professor compared the situation to a relevant example that reflected conflict resolution in the workplace and explained the criticality of professional negotiation. The professor told the student group that failing to reach an agreement would be unacceptable in the workplace and could even possibly lead to termination if conflicts went unresolved, because eventually someone is accountable for signing off on decisions and reporting the progress of business.

To illustrate another example, Faculty A remembered a particular time when differences in standards was obvious. He explained that a few faculty and approximately ten students were working on an inter-disciplinary project when the faculty began to argue in front of the students over differences in approach. Eventually, the students began to take sides and the small disagreement escalated into a much larger argument. When it dissipated, Faculty A reiterated that conflict is healthy and happens in business often (personal communication, March 28, 2017).

Despite difficulties and differences, the data acknowledged that PBL with non-profit project partners was a worthwhile investment that justified the extra effort and commitment of stakeholders because it produced more advantages than disadvantages. As found in this study, collaboration required stakeholders to compromise feasible time commitments, focus on objective or objectives and determine standards of ethics and operations.

**Appropriate distribution of power.** The Administrator clarified that PBL at JWU is a faculty-driven initiative, and although partnerships and projects were in some cases effectively self-managed, they were difficult to replicate to a larger group of participants while maintaining
quality and consistency in the program (personal communication, March 3, 2017). EE&CS became responsible for managing the logistics of tracking and reporting PBL, but the newly improved structure and policies are voluntary for faculty at the moment. In order for JWU to capitalize on the value of PBL, activity needs to be captured and celebrated as part of the University’s experiential learning focus. The Administrator expects that when centralized reporting proves easy to navigate and fruitful, that other faculty will see value and become interested in participation.

**Multi-directional leadership.** It appeared that the Administrator, Faculty Members and Project Partner realized the importance of partnership, as they all agreed on the necessity for shared responsibility, as well as leadership support to maximize engagement. This finding concluded that leaders who shared authority as well as control empowered beneficiaries to take accountability for their individual actions as well as the results of the group. The participants seemed open-minded about distributing leadership and agreed that times have changed in which the diversity in skills, experiences and opinions of multiple people is advantageous in collaborative situations. The participants acknowledged that distributing leadership among stakeholders, both independently through hierarchical layers as well as across organizations, would more accurately develop the talent pipeline as students would be exposed to interdisciplinary collaboration, treated as peers, and expected to act as professionals.

**Conclusion B: The Effectiveness of Partnership is Enhanced When Resources are Shared Within the University and Across the Non-profit Organization**

The nature of the partnership between JWU and SCCRI is cross-functionally and inter-organizationally integrated, meaning that internal and external stakeholders work together across
departmental and organizational boundaries, in partnership to leverage resources and integrate processes.

**Stakeholder integration.** The term *reciprocity* was consistently mentioned throughout the various data sources utilized in this study, representing the collective value found to be integral in strategic partnerships. This study revealed that each stakeholder group involved in this case offered vital subject matter expertise in distinct areas such as administrative operations, teaching, onboarding, and industry relevance, the totality of which participants found to be extremely beneficial when cross-utilized. For example, Faculty C insisted that the biggest challenge SCCRI has is human capacity, and for the most part the Organization relies on temporary government-funded employees, students, and volunteers to carry out the day-to-day operational responsibilities. The Project Partner agreed that the resources are scarce for non-profits and reported that DEE, CEE and internship programs offset financial constraints in particular because students develop relevant skills and experience. SCCRI is able to apply its funds elsewhere to maintain the Organization’s stability. Concluding the first observation session, the team of students met the proud SCCRI Project Partner, who expressed his gratitude for their participation as well as the involvement of previous students; he stated his willingness to commit his time and energy to mentor students in return for their highly valued contributions. The Project Partner confirmed that SCCRI has made great progress and reiterated that JWU has been an important constituent in the program’s success (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

**Sharing knowledge.** This study found that stakeholders who embraced a pro-learning, cross-functional culture enhanced the exchange of ideas across layers and throughout hierarchal boundaries. When cooperation happened on every level, top down, bottom up and system wide,
the collective value was reported by participants to be more impactful. In April 2015, the JWU Associate Provost, who has since moved on from JWU, hosted a three-hour faculty symposium on the Providence Harborside Campus that inspired collaboration and sharing teaching practices. Faculty C found the lightning rounds, table discussions and guest speakers to be highly beneficial, and stated that she walked away with numerous connections as a result of the symposium (personal communication, April 3, 2017). Most notably was that she met a fellow professor who teaches in a complimentary discipline, and now they partner to swap areas of expertise; the fellow professor covers a virtual reality and augmented reality gadgets segment in the social media class, and Faculty C teaches social media for a business class (personal communication, April 3, 2017). Connections such as these were discovered to be important by each of the participants because they increased the effectiveness of interaction, as all contributing members are invested in the outcomes.

*Developing trust.* This conclusion recognized that developing trusted partnerships took time and attention, but was a necessary factor that made integration easier for the involved stakeholders. Faculty C preferred quality over quantity, so she sought to develop a continuous partnership with SCCRI as opposed to developing temporary relationships with multiple partners. She claimed that although some academic administrators believe in avoiding investments in a sole partnership, she felt that it afforded her with the opportunity to cultivate a trusted relationship in which she is confident in the depth of experience that students have received (personal communication, April 3, 2017). Faculty A also advocated for concentrated efforts in developing fewer partnerships with highly committed stakeholders (personal communication, March 28, 2016).
**Prospects of long-term engagement.** In many cases, it is doubtful that short-term projects will develop the level of trust and loyalty necessary for extended partnerships (Manning & Sydow, 2011). Yet, as this case study suggested, project-based partnerships can be productive beyond single projects. The data revealed that SE was more probable of turning into a long-term partnership if it developed from an existing touch point or relationship versus a cold connection. The JWU and SCCRI partnership, for example, was established due to a pre-existing relationship between Faculty A and the Project Partner as a result of their shared experience as Southside residents with board positions on a local community development organization. Consequently, they were able to build trust and uncover comparable personal and professional philosophies. Then, along with a few additional committed faculty and their students, they joined forces to chart unfamiliar territory that accessed project work, which in turn progressed SCCRI to the point of being organized enough to be somewhat self-sufficient. The involved stakeholders had a joint understanding and gathered adequate information to shed light on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, along with enough planning to recognize what they each had to offer and how that aligned with other potential partners.

**Conclusion C: Faculty are the Driving Force of Pedagogical Change and are Central to the Sustainability of Partnership**

The purpose of the strategic partnership between the university and non-profit organization in this case was to help each of the stakeholders involved, but also to make consistent operational changes to build momentum for holistic change. The researcher learned that committed and adaptable stakeholders throughout the hierarchy who engage with each other in day-to-day business while taking top-line, long-term socially responsible stances thought of
themselves as upholding the fundamentals of community through individual, social, political, economic and cultural connectivity.

**Holistic change.** The Faculty Members indicated that PBL presented a catalyst for change, innovation, knowledge, growth and sustainability. The data encourages HEI and policy makers to rethink conventional approaches to education (teaching and learning) and to consider the far-reaching impact of those modifications on a wide group of stakeholders. The findings suggested that the integration and engagement within and across organizations to manage PBL relied heavily on the involvement of the Faculty Members; they are the driving force of pedagogical change and also central to the sustainability of partnership.

**Culture shift.** HEI have the resources, power and social responsibility to achieve holistic change, but adjustments are necessary to realize the interconnectedness and shared vision of multiple internal and external stakeholder groups. The findings proposed that a culture shift in higher education was essential to gaining traction in support of innovative curriculum. The participants back PBL pedagogy because it contrasts with rote learning, memorization, and teacher-centered lecture in that it integrates content with practice from a more realistic point of view for students entering the world of work. All of the participants are experienced professionals, an element identified as making the transition to collaboratively managing PBL easier to navigate; the researcher found that stakeholders with previous experience adjusted to and enjoyed transformative change as a result of industry immersion. In particular, Faculty A has a background in marketing, an industry built on innovation, and as a self-proclaimed “rebel rouser” (personal communication, March 28, 2017), he has the reputation of thinking outside the box and thriving on challenging the status quo.
While the Faculty Members were found to be central to the sustainability of this partnership, the participants implied that the shift in culture to embrace new ideas and concepts should extend beyond this group to assure that similar partnerships and projects can be continued. For instance, Faculty B argued that students must also understand the importance of a PBL approach and said that instead of consumers, students should be permitted to identify with providers, creators and suppliers. She also insisted that students must gain experience offering products, services, knowledge, and research expertise, so industry expectations are less shocking for graduates (personal communication, May 3, 2017). The participants claimed that students must engage in industry-relevant ways, and affirmed that students have valuable contributions to bring to real-world partnerships and with clear expectations and encouragement from stakeholders, students would adjust. Since PBL centers on student engagement, the participants specified that disinterest on the student’s behalf would be detrimental to partnerships and projects. The lack of student motivation regarding group work was a prevalent concern mentioned by the participants. However, a majority of students involved in PBL tend to have an increase in “motivation, more engagement in course content and a deeper understanding of context and relevance of academic content” (jwulibrary, n.d.-c, para. 9). The Project Partner agreed that student enthusiasm was apparent when working together on new concepts and ideas.

The participants each confirmed that a culture change is required by HEI. They explained that higher education and government operate as bureaucratic systems, and when working with various groups in large organizations, movement tends to be slow. Consequently, innovative ideas were likely to be met with tension from involved stakeholders who have differing attitudes regarding change. This study showed how faculty and staff worked primarily on short-term operations in support of the University’s overarching purpose, whereas leadership
focused on long-term strategy. The Faculty Members said these role dynamics present an opportunity to capitalize on stakeholder integration because systematic change can only evolve into systemic change if the independent groups recognize their interdependence. The findings recommended stakeholders can further integrate by agreeing to invest in each other, sharing knowledge, developing trust, distributing power and engaging in open communication and collaboration.

**Innovation.** The findings in this study also suggested that traditional education, in some ways, encourages students to think work is organized for them; however, working on authentic projects with partners from organizations and industry teaches them otherwise, because complexities of the workforce remain uncertain and require initiative as well as tenacity. In analyzing the data, embracing PBL presented a learning curve for faculty, students and HEI, none of whom have the exact answers to challenges posed during authentic PBL. However, this mirrors industry in that resources are available but are not as overt, requiring a great deal of critical thinking, problem solving, and team-based decision-making. Therefore, the researcher understood PBL and collaborative partnerships to be a more accurate representation of industry. Unlike industry, though, Faculty G claimed that higher education is “not innovative and always playing catch up” (personal communication, July, 12, 2017). Today,

> everything is about collaboration. Innovation's about collaboration. If you're gonna innovate, then you need to collaborate. It's just common sense. If we're not innovating, if we're not collaborating, and it's what the world is asking for, then it's a disconnect.

(Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017)

The data put forward the idea that there is a breakdown between the current education system and industry, but this case study has demonstrated how stakeholders can be integrated through
innovative curriculum and explained how administrators and faculty adjusted courses to match industry and societal demand to maximize the opportunity for students and graduates.

**Sustainability.** Predictions of major change in the landscape of higher education suggested that less expensive and more accessible online or interactive web-based alternatives to learning are becoming not only attractive to students, but more feasible and potentially more threatening to the education system as we know it today (Baldwin, 2013; Harden, 2012). The Faculty Members advised that colleges and universities must differentiate themselves if they want to survive in changing times; however, HEI must shake their rigid thoughts confined by historical perspectives regarding what education has been or is supposed to be, and instead focus on what education can be, in order to educate in practical and meaningful ways. Faculty B referenced Carelman’s (1984) “Tandem Convergent” (p. 72) also known as the “Convergent Bicycle” (Norman, 1988, p.13), an image of two bicycles facing each other that are conjoined at the front tire. The convergent bicycle is immobilized because of its design, whereby the forces oppose each other, yet remain connected. Faculty B stated that this collision represents the present standstill in academia, depicting that instead of trying to innovate effective solutions, the state of education is stagnant because there are conflicting goals between stakeholders and organizations. The participants’ position on this issue was to urge academic institutions to embrace evolution toward progressive and meaningful education. They remain confident and forecasted that the future of higher education will be collaborative and reciprocal.

As this study verified, quality education paired with engagement between like-minded stakeholders can serve several purposes in order to promote comprehensive change. This conclusion articulated the purpose of inter-organizational arraignments, which is to enact change that positively contributes to the sustainability of higher education. It proposed that stakeholders
who attempt to improve the effectiveness of strategic partnerships and programs with an emphasis on integrative experiential models, and market them effectively, can encourage stronger coalitions to cooperatively build sustainable systems for HEI, the workforce and society.

**Discussion of the Literature**

The world has become increasingly globalized and in response industry has changed the requirements for employment (Korfhage Smith, 2010). In a fast-paced, ever-changing world, educators must be forward-thinking in order to predict and adapt themselves to stay relevant. However, higher education has not evolved along with the digital era (Harden, 2012; Millar, 2013; McCluskey & Winter, 2012; Stommel, 2013), so it is no longer a question of whether or not people, projects or organizations should engage, but rather with whom, when and how they should engage (Jeffrey, 2009). Jacobson (2001) advocated that “education partnerships designed to take advantage of this convergence have the potential to become powerful agents of institutional reform in pursuit of higher academic achievement, better jobs, and more productive workplaces” (p.45).

**Partnership management.** Project-based programs have the ability for extensive customization by the end user, meaning HEI may elect one style, all styles or even customized versions of PBL. The researcher found that while program management and facilitation of PBL without project partners remains relatively comparable, in more authentic situations the management of the stakeholders and partnership processes between them remains undefined. Educators, professionals, employers and students must engage; it is a necessity that they take part in continuous collaboration in order to align expectations across stakeholder groups to assure meaningful engagement (Romenti et al., 2012). To ensure successful management of partnerships and programs, as well as to lessen potential issues that are likely to occur due to the
fact that there are many interacting forces, multiple suggestions were made in the literature.

At the broadest level of systematic intervention, Amaral and Matsusaki (2016) offered the Method Improvement Cycle (See Figure 1) to manage the development of PBL courses with project partners. This cycle encompasses a three-phased process that could be useful to interested institutions looking to overhaul traditional learning: (1) exploratory actions, or the determination of effective PBL program and facilitation style; (2) the creation of partnerships, the construction of networks and strategic partners; (3) and expansion, program growth:

![Figure 1. The Method Improvement Cycle. From “The Dynamics of Connecting Universities, Non-governmental Organizations and Community Members by Means of Academic Projects Directed at People in Need”, by J. A. A. D. Amaral and C. T. M. Matsusaki, 2016, Educational Action Research, p.8. Reprinted with permission.](image)

In examining phase two of this cycle, Alba’s (2014) proposal of a Five-step Partnership Development Plan (no figure available) appears to be an ideal sub-component, as it focuses on a continuation of uniting stakeholders in a joint effort to manage partnerships rather than creating partnerships. For example, the five steps suggested are the following: (1) needs assessment: identification of complementary vision and mission between stakeholders; (2) evaluation of joint resources assessment & development; (3) review of collaborative goals and objectives; (4) discussion of partnership management; (5) and examination of documentation and evaluation.
Alternatively, Worsley (2016) promoted the classic *Stakeholder Management Model* as the foundation to the principals for SE (See Figure 2). In this model, a circular process is utilized to assess both the significance of stakeholders as well as ways in which to manage and engage them.

![Figure 2. Stakeholder Management Model. From Stakeholder-led Project Management: Changing the Way we Manage Projects (p. 12), by L. M. Worsley, 2016, New York, NY: Business Expert Press, LLC. Reprinted with permission.](image)

In the same way, but more specific to SE than stakeholder management, Jeffrey (2009) outlined *The Process Flow of Stakeholder Engagement* (See Figure 3) to be used as a guide to engage stakeholders successfully. This particular seven-step process guides engagement from start to finish allowing organizations to build on past experiences and also plan for the future.

![Figure 3. The Process of Stakeholder Engagement. From “Stakeholder Engagement: A Road Map to Meaningful Engagement” (p. 9), by N. Jeffrey, 2009 (https://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/dinamic-content/media/CR%20Stakeholder.pdf). The Doughty Centre for Corporate Responsibility, Cranfield School of Management. Reprinted with permission.](image)
**Power dynamics.** Long-term partnerships are best managed when stakeholders come to mutual agreements on the terms and conditions of the arrangement (Grant et al., 2010; Preston & Donaldson, 1999); “conflicts involving technical disagreements, interest concerns, and value differences” (Margerum, 2002, p. 246) have been identified as significant obstacles in collaborative planning. Marullo, Moayedi and Cooke (2009) agreed that partners should collaborate on roles, responsibilities and timelines, but cautioned inequities in such agreements, insisting that stakeholders “be intentional about discussing power-sharing, division of labor, communication practices, and methods for mutual account-ability” (p. 68). As such, this case study found that the intersection of multiple organizations created the need for internal and external stakeholders to be united in such a way to figure out how to share power through collaborative decision-making.

In a traditional sense, a leader has a clearly defined role of power, authority, and ultimate responsibility for successes and failures of an organization, but Gronn (1983) opposed top-down organizational structures and introduced the idea that management could move beyond “unilateral and uni-dimensional” (p.9) approaches. Multi-directional and distributed leadership styles are expansive and offer promise in the development of highly effective collaborative teams better suited for many of today’s education and work environments (Solansky, 2008). More so, “decentralized decision-making, bottom-up incentives, and empowerment of employees better serve the infrastructure of the immediate future” (Sengel, 2004, p. 25) and also contribute to longer-lasting partnerships. The literature clarified how power is often perceived negatively in terms of forced authority to gain followership compliance, and on the contrary, influence is regarded as positive because it inspires voluntary compliance; this dichotomy is indicative of the polarity between the assumptions of management versus leadership (Bryman, Collinson, Grint,
Jackson & Uhl-Bien, 2011). The Administrator in this case study aligned with the latter and stated how she believes that “a good practice is to not mandate or force participation, but rather find your faculty cheerleaders. Those who are already doing it, happy to do it, doing well. Let them have great experiences and then others will follow” (personal communication, March 3, 2017). Effective leadership involves the potential and capacity to influence followers; it is “the process of motivating people to work together collaboratively to accomplish great things” (Vroom & Jago, 2007, p. 18). Multi-directional and distributed leadership approaches are well-suited for strategic partnerships because they limit the distinctions between power and inspiration, merging them to create cohesive direction (Bryman, Collinson, Grint, Jackson & Uhl-Bien, 2011). Dissimilarly, Kramer and Crespy (2011) found that the need for authoritarian approaches were occasionally justified in temporary groups due to time limitations.

One of the many roles of HEI is in determining the operational infrastructure to culminate continuous student engagement for higher learning purposes (Itin, 1999; Veblen, 1918). However, it is argued that education managed in business-like ways “conduces to perfunctory and mediocre work throughout, and acts to deter both students and teachers from a free pursuit of knowledge, as contrasted with the pursuit of academic credits” (Veblen, 1918, para. 5). Therefore, a sense of stability between exploration and operation may be necessary. Going back to fundamental roots, Dewey (1938) recommended that organization and planning of EE be “flexible enough to permit free play for individuality of experience and yet firm enough to give direction towards continuous development of power” (p. 58). Nevertheless, Donahue (2001) suggested that academics as well as students have “struggled with how to maintain this balance” (Donahue, 2001, p. 32).
The literature explained that one of the greatest difficulties in transitioning to PBL involved faculty giving up control for the betterment of student engagement and learning outcomes (Buck Institute of Education, 2015; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015). Autonomy is synonymous with the tradition of higher education and “curricular power is not easily relinquished” (Dickeson, 2010, p. 21). However, stakeholders that disperse authority increase the chance of prosperous collaboration (Solansky, 2008), as found in this study. Building authentic respect and trust among stakeholders while sharing ownership of control on collaborative projects is likely to transpire into effective organizational performance (Cho & Brown, 2013; Harris, Chisholm, & Burns, 2013; Manning & Sydow, 2011; Preston & Donaldson, 1999). Evidence from the literature claimed that time and fit were necessary to develop trust, which has been identified as a leading factor in improving performance and achieving a competitive advantage among stakeholders (Buonora, 2016; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Recognizing the existing and appropriate level of trust is a critical component for SE (Jeffrey, 2009).

**Program management.** Even with resources available, Jeffrey (2009) claimed that it remains a challenge for organizations to manage stakeholders, particularly considering the intricacies of modern business. In regard to managing programs, Morgan (1983) described three relevant models of PBL in higher education:

The first, *Project Exercise* represents “the most traditional kind of PBL” (Helle et al., 2006, p. 289). Project Exercise is an embedded project or projects in an academic course specified by the facilitator, requiring the integrative application of pre-existing subject knowledge and techniques (Helle et al., 2006; Morgan, 1983). It is the closest model resembling JWU’s CEE program, where “students apply expertise developed in the classroom to a real-
world product or project that will help local community-based organizations [and businesses] meet their service or business goals” (Connery, 2012, para. 1.).

The second is *Project Component*, which is not part of a course or obligatory to be discipline specific, but ties to contemporary real-world issues requiring interdisciplinary knowledge (Helle et al., 2006; Morgan, 1983). In some cases, the Project Component can supplement a standard course, in other words “traditionally taught courses are studied in parallel with the project course” (Helle et al., 2006, p. 289), as found to be the case with the JWU’s DEE program.

The third is *Project Orientation*, an institution-wide PBL approach. Project Orientation is a self-directed, curriculum-based philosophy empowering students to drive the projects that “form the entire basis of their university education” (Helle et al., p. 290). For example, Henry et al. (2012) conducted a descriptive case study that demonstrated one university’s choice to replace the standard curriculum of an engineering materials course with PBL. In this situation, field-related problems were pre-assigned to the class by the facilitator, whereas other HEI may have traditionally allowed students to research and develop their own problems or questions. In different scenarios, facilitators assign groups, while some permit self-selection. PBL can be confined to the classroom, or like JWU’s CEE program rely on outside project partners from participating organizations to add dynamic perspectives associated with real-world practice.

As demonstrated, PBL program management varies by stakeholder, and although flexibility can be beneficial, it can be equally as challenging due to inconsistencies. Accordingly, Buck Institute for Education provides extensive resources to assist with developing and managing PBL programs (The Buck Institute for Education, n.d.-a). In 2010, the Institute presented eight essential elements for effective PBL, and in 2014 it was reinvigorated (See
Figure 4) to include a comprehensive, research-based model known as Gold Standard PBL (Buck Institute of Education, 2015). This update improved consistency among users across grade levels and subject areas, and ramping up rigor assured the authenticity of PBL is delivered and not mistaken for project work (Mergendoller & Larmer, 2015). Preparing students for school and life experiences is at the core of the standard, which includes goals of student learning, as well as elements of essential project design and facilitation. Leaders from Buck Institute for Education suggest step-by-step processes for the design, implementation and assessment of programs from a facilitator’s standpoint, as considered in the following section (Larmer et al., 2015).

**Figure 4.** Old PBL Model and New Gold Standard PBL Model. From “Why we changed our model of the 8 Essential Elements of PBL” (pp. 1-2), by J. R. Mergendoller and J. Larmer, 2015 (www.bie.org/blog/why_we_changed_our_model_of_the_8_essential_elements_of_pbl). Buck Institute for Education. Reprinted with permission.

**Design.** Program development takes form when a stakeholder(s) either create or modify a project based on the core content of a course or program in alignment with curriculum standards and overall PBL pedagogy. Resources to assist with design may exist informally, resulting from the work of experienced PBL facilitators (faculty) or formally, through centralized administration; this case study captured that transition for JWU. Support may exist internally at
individual HEI as well as externally through direct contact with professional organizations loyal
to PBL initiatives, such as Buck Institute for Education. Either way, it is suggested that PBL
design include a mix of activities encouraging situational (social interaction) as well as
individual interest to increase student attentiveness (Jones et al., 2013). Student voice should be
considered throughout the planning stage, the duration of the project, and even afterwards (Cho

Program design is customizable, spanning between one large assignment and shorter-
term projects over the duration of an entire term or year (Henry et al., 2012). In some
circumstances, a packaged complex case or role-playing design is used, which would require
students to create projects regarding detailed narratives of a fictitious or previously enacted real-
life scenario. At other times, projects are more authentic involving partnerships with an industry
or community project partner seeking assistance with real-life problems, thus requiring research-
based solutions (Cho & Brown, 2013; Davidson, et al., 2010). This case study represented the
latter, as it described the process and system of partnership between JWU and SCCRI, focusing
on how they collaboratively managed PBL.

**Implementation.** English and Kitsantas (2013) suggested that implementation activities
constitute three phases: including project/problem launch; guided inquiry and product/ solution
creation; and project/ problem conclusion. The titles of these phases were slightly abbreviated to
accommodate a project-based context (as opposed to a problem-based context) and are further
described below:

*Phase 1: project launch.* An assortment of acceptable projects exists derivative of
current trends or issues in the major’s field, or an option such as JWU’s CEE program in which
an institution includes authentic case scenarios from project partners, sponsors or clients. CEE
requires students to “apply academic and professional skills in the context of work experience, service or a project that involves a ‘real life’ community or industry partner” (jwuhotelschool.blogspot.com, 2016). Certain fields such as “film, software, consulting, and construction industries” are more apt to operate using project-based methods (Manning & Sydow, 2011, p. 1370).

Based on what materialized from the literature, students are grouped and then guided by a facilitator through the initial process of discerning a question or problem. Ideation of projects, both content and format can be independent of project partners (external clients) from the community or industry, or it can be collaborative with direct participation. When involved, the partner may be present during project launch and project conclusion phases (Amaral & Matsusaki, 2016). The Project Partner in this case study preferred to be present at both (when feasible) to assure students were channeling their efforts in the right direction; he felt a responsibility to mentor students and uphold his commitment to the partnership.

Once the project parameters are defined, students benchmark existing knowledge to identify what they need to know (inquiry) in order to accomplish pre-determined goals within the group’s established guidelines for teamwork (English & Kitsantas, 2013; Henry, et al., 2012). During this time, facilitators, “explicitly and implicitly promote student independence and growth, open-ended inquiry, team spirit, and attention to quality” (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015, para.5). Facilitators empower students and move from the position of authoritarian and expect students to take accountability for learning (Dunlap, 2005; English & Kitsantas, 2013). They also “employ a variety of lessons, tools, and instructional strategies to support all students in reaching project goals” (Buck Institute of Education, 2015, p. 8). Davidson et al., (2010) have urged faculty and students to move beyond traditional roles of authority and amateur, to that of a
peer-to-peer relationship in order to better engage in project-related partnerships between themselves as well as with external project partners.

The literature suggested that accountability, increased workloads and organization are perceived by students as negative aspects of PBL (Martelli & Watson, 2016). These factors were found to put additional pressure on the facilitator to apply coaching strategies that aimed to uphold student morale regarding project work with classmates. Jones et al., (2013) warned that “Facilitators who do not provide the appropriate amount of guided mentoring could lead to students who are frustrated, unmotivated, and unable to achieve the course objectives” (p. 40).

Observation captured Faculty D transitioning between roles while also referencing the importance of such a strategy to students, primarily in an effort to mirror the workplace.

Course expectations, checkpoints and due dates should be established and communicated well in advance, and in most cases at the start of the course. English and Kitsantas (2013) cautioned that if an organized framework is not presented and consistently followed as closely as possible, which is what the stakeholders in this case are working together to solidify, then PBL can result in confused students, especially if they have been conditioned to learn in traditional lecture-style environments. To illustrate, one study showed that students were confused by what they thought to be the lack of instruction (Henry et al., 2012). Instead of faculty lecturing to passive audiences of students, they promote individual discovery and active learning (English & Kitsantas, 2013; Golding, 2011; Jones et al., 2013). The literature recommended that facilitators provide students an outline of detailed project instructions and examples to increase successful outcomes (Dunlap, 2005; English & Kitsantas, 2013).

In another university case study, Henry et al. (2012) found that the PBL design had broken several problems into distinct modules that spanned the entire course term. The
researchers explained that the first module was an exemplar; it modeled the expectation and use of contextual resources. It included helpful graphics, project requirements as well as grading rubrics. Each subsequent module contained subject information and textbook materials to guide students with independent inquiry. Facilitators provided project structure with a planning worksheet that helped students organize problem solving and project aspects such as key concepts, learning issues, reflection, and research task assignments (Henry et al., 2012). Upon completion of the second module, the facilitator provided initial feedback, and groups were given the opportunity to resubmit their projects; this strategy tends to set students up for success as they advance to the next module. Even with that structure in place, students preferred that facilitators move beyond “explicit directions, requirements statements, performance rubrics, feedback, and examples of good projects” and “wanted more specific answers to questions” (Henry et al., 2012, p.53). Although proven to be successful in this study, clear and continuous two-way communication remains a core challenge for stakeholders involved in the transition to PBL approaches (Henry et al., 2012).

**Phase 2: guided inquiry and product creation.** The bulk of PBL work takes place when “students engage in complex learning tasks, such as choosing their own path to learning, constructing meaning, reflecting, incorporating feedback, and revising their ideas” (English & Kitsantas, 2013, p. 135). In this case study, the researcher observed the active inquiry of students and the assistant to the Project Partner when collaborating with each other to gather information necessary to brainstorm solutions, identify resources and chart progress. The scope of the conversation centered on the flow of financial resources, the development of a centralized communication channel, the documentation of standard operating procedures and expansion opportunities. The students suggested areas of consideration and even noted how various
programs might complement the brand while making use of SCCRI’s space during non-peak periods (personal observation, March 20, 2017).

Throughout the process, partners and facilitators tend to stand back, only intervening to coach the progression, verifying understanding and questioning critical thinking approaches. They empower students to arrive at their own conclusion and limited teaching students what to think or telling them exactly what to do. During the second observation session, Faculty D urged the students to start the class by convening with their teammates for a few minutes prior to the first presentation. Faculty D communicated the expectations: “This is about in-house reporting, where every one of you is a consultant on a team and has to report on what you are doing out-of-house. This is a place where it is perfectly okay to discuss strengths, or areas of uncertainty or challenges because we are your resources” (personal observation, March 21, 2017).

Each team received 8-10 minutes to present, and when they approached the floor, they became the owners of the floor. Faculty D commented “This is your space, you own it” (personal observation, March 21, 2017). Then she shouted, “Call meeting to order”, which captured the attention of the 16 students present. She followed by reminding them, “Remember, this presentation operates like it would in the field. When the team that has the floor presents, they are to be the only group speaking, they have control” (Faculty D, personal observation, March 21, 2017). Faculty D then sat in the back of the classroom and said “I’ll be where I belong, because I am not driving the bus” (personal observation, March 21, 2017), which reiterated that the students were being held accountable and expected to lead. When the team finished their presentation, the class moved into workshop mode, which provided an opportunity for open discussion among the class or colleagues. Faculty D was fair and considerate when issuing feedback, often times going back and forth between roles of supporter and critic,
manager and faculty, while remaining cognizant of how much time and energy was required of the students. Then the teams reconnected, discussed the weekly content information, and were given time for open collaboration to exchange final ideas before departing for the afternoon.

In many cases, facilitators assist students with organizational structure and suggest potential resources that support the driving question or problem, thus the incorporation of conceptual knowledge. In addition, facilitators urge deeper understanding by asking “metacognitive-level questions” such as: “What information is important in the documentation provided by the client” or “What do you notice about the client’s request for that functionality?” (Dunlap, 2005, p. 71). Scaffolding student learning by incorporating a range of strategies encourages appropriate direction for students to continue on a path of progress; the incorporation of project milestones and interim deliverables promotes the groups responsibility to continue pace with the course (Henry et al., 2012). Depending on the design, students may be asked to develop a team plan or group contract. The contract would involve assigning preliminary roles such as leader, time keeper, scribe, etc. upfront, in addition to creating a team charter that outlines communication plans on how to handle conflict should it arise. Students are then asked to complete a variety of tasks dependent upon the program or course along with the expected project outcomes.

Dunlap (2005) explained one capstone iteration where software development students experienced a term-long project mimicking the real-world structures and protocol of a typical technology-centered workplace. Clients were asked to submit a request for proposal (RFP) revealing any potential problems and anticipated needs for execution of the project. Students were grouped into teams of three to four and were provided with project information from the facilitator and the client. Next, the groups of students conducted a problem analysis drawing on
potential solution designs that emerged from their research. Then students were prompted to implement and test their conclusions as well as respond with a formal proposal, just as they would in a standard project-based work environment. Dunlap (2005) credits the PBL phases utilized in this example to the work of Barrows (1985), and although it is compatible with PBL, it is technically modeled after a problem-based learning method.

Phase 3: project conclusion. Typically, upon the completion of deliverables, students reflect on project work by reporting their findings in relation to the objectives. To illustrate and connect back to the previous example, students presented on the technical and operational strategies selected to complete the project, along with possible alternatives they would consider for future development (Dunlap, 2005). They deliberated on the challenges and opportunities in an active discussion with the class, facilitator and project partner. An open-forum sharing method allowed the team as well as the audience members to discuss the project context in addition to factors of overall success, hence contributing to enhanced engagement and learning for all involved.

Assessment. After the submission of final reports or presentations, concluding feedback was provided by the facilitator. Henry et al., (2012) found that students preferred timely, evenly distributed feedback reflective of their problem-solving methods and recommended solutions, as opposed to exclusive emphasis on grammar and formatting. Student engagement and assessment of PBL is well-represented in the literature and reveals that consistent, candid developmental feedback as well as formal discussion of appropriate outcomes are effective throughout the duration of the project (Buck Institute of Education, 2015; Dunlap, 2005; Jones et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2014). The learning outcomes of JWU’s CEE program vary based on the course in which the CEE is associated with, as approved by the JWU curriculum committee. It seeks “to achieve
designated learning outcomes through the implementation of a project that utilizes course or program-related skills to assist a nonprofit organization or government entity” (jwulibrary, n.d.-c, para. 13).

**Tools.** Usually, stakeholders implement PBL programs while putting in substantive effort to capture the transformation of student learning through meaningful assessment, this information allows for continual and legitimate improvements for both student and program success (Qualters, 2010). Self-assessments and peer-assessments of individual as well as group contribution should be conducted to gain a holistic perspective of understanding (Buck Institute of Education, 2015; Cho & Brown, 2013; English & Kitsantas, 2013; Jones et al., 2013; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015). EE&CS and faculty at JWU have piloted a multi-layered assessment tool to evaluate the partnership, including a Student CEE Self-Assessment Survey, a CEE Faculty Assessment Form, and a CEE Project Partner Assessment Form. with plans to continue collaboration to improve functionality. Assessments provide a vehicle for worthwhile data to extend beyond a limited subset of eyes, to that of larger stakeholder groups (Qualters, 2010). For instance, once captured, the data can be shared with primary and secondary stakeholders; as in JWU’s case, it can be disseminated to leadership as well as marketed internally and externally for continued support.

Griffin, Lorenz, and Mitchell (2010) developed INCoRe; a model for reflective teaching and learning, including a comprehensive student survey to gain feedback essential for improvement of EL programming. The tool focused on understanding how to enhance student experiences, because they are the linchpin of the relationships between HEI and its stakeholders. Although understanding multiple stakeholders’ experiences is a serious component for assessment, inclusive strategies that evaluate partnerships and program management is lacking
(Lapan et al., 2002).

Grading. To evaluate the progress of students, “teachers use formative and summative assessments of knowledge, understanding, and success skills” (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015, para. 8) to obtain and report critical data. Faculty B said,

Don't give students grades on every step of the project give them a check and comments.
The grade comes at the end, so they are always in growth mind set, not ‘I screwed up’.
You get a check or if you get a check minus, ‘it’s okay you didn't quite meet the standard, but correct everything before the next step and you can end up with 100 at the end’. That is the growth mind set. (Faculty B, personal communication, May 3, 2017)

Faculty A also advocated for competency-based grading, pointing out, “I think [higher education institutions] need to focus on soft skills; [they] need to focus on learning. I think we should eliminate the whole notion of grade point averages” (personal communication, March 28, 2017).

Faculty A continued,

If everything was based on competency skills, who says [students] have to take four years to graduate? Somebody can do this in four weeks, and somebody needs 15, or needs to do it and redo it, and redo it type of thing. That's why you're here. You're here to learn. That's the whole point of it. It's mastery of skill as opposed to, you take this third of the project, you take this third of the project, and you take this third of the project, and we'll write it up and slap it together. (Faculty A, personal communication, March 28, 2017)

The Faculty Members claimed competency-based models prepare students for professional work environments, since “in industry, you aren’t going to get $50 bucks [regardless of your performance], you are going to get paid and they will support you in what you are doing if they like it [and won’t if they don’t], get paid or get fired” (Faculty B, personal communication, May
Faculty G supported the idea of competency-based grading and stated, “It is more cutting-edge; we should pilot it” (personal communication, July, 12, 2017).

Reflection. A possible strategy to engage students in EE through PBL is the inclusion of reflection journals as a component of the overall project; they can be supplementary, for credit, or in some cases count toward participation. Reflection can help students take the time to be present in learning, to digest information, as well as process the value of positive and negative experiences. Journaling can be a concrete source of data collection and evaluation, particularly if there are guided questions. Early journal prompts can act as a pre-assessment, with later prompts acting as post-assessment. For example, questions such as “Are you confident that you can deal with the demands of real software projects? Why or why not?” contrasted with “Compared to three weeks ago, how confident are you that you can deal with the demands of real software projects?” (Dunlap, 2005, p. 73). Responses are likely to evolve beyond a journal entry; for instance, the researcher recalled that JWU’s internship program highlighted reflection as an opportunity for students to develop transferable skills, which can be easily translated to a resume and used as concrete examples during interviews.

Sustainment. The literature presented a qualitative research study that examined the benefits of integrated projects that merged resources from academia, business and a professional organization (Grant et al., 2010). The study itself focused on a senior capstone experience model in which the students from two courses worked on a year-long implementation project for a local city. Upon completion of the project, students submitted a proposal to speak at a professional conference. After a selection process, the students who were chosen to participate presented on their topic and also networked with industry professionals. The outcomes exhibited an upsurge in student motivation from those who effectively learned the material as a result of working with
real clients on authentic projects, as opposed to mock scenarios or situations in textbooks. The experience itself was constructive for students, and the capability for them to network and market accomplishments during an active job search was a positive result as well (Grant et al., 2010).

McPhail (2004) says “In today's economic crunch--a weak economic recovery, growing competition from overseas and increasing demands from employers for workers with job-ready training--[collaborative] partnerships become even more critical” (p.31). Enhancement to the education system to include collaborative partnerships better equip graduates for the workforce (Jacobson, 2001; Roger, 2014) and as global citizens of the world. Further, “the appeal and benefits of a project-based curriculum resonates with millennials who make up the most pervasive community in higher education” (Smith & Gibson, 2016, p. 42). Even the slightest modifications in curriculum would support graduate readiness (Schawbel & Bisharat, 2015).

JWU founders believed in “professionally [and socially] focused education” (Brouillard, 2013, p. 21) to prepare graduates; PBL aligns with these fundamental ideals. However, the literature claimed that in order to carry out collaborative partnerships, then compatibility in philosophical, ethical and operational standards, as well as in-depth commitment is required from the involved stakeholders (Alba, 2014; Larmer et al., 2015; Yukl, 2012). For example, the literature presented a reoccurring implementation challenge stating that the “organization and administration of project-based courses can be very time-consuming” (Helle et al., 2006, p. 304).

PBL can be difficult to execute, posing many challenges in the development and sustainment of partnerships and projects. Therefore, Cho and Brown (2013) suggest a combination of internal as well as external support to assist with on-going professional development. The Administrator agreed and recommended that stakeholders “work with the
outcomes and assessment team [at their institution], because that not only strengthens your program but also leverages credibility with the faculty” (Administrator, personal communication, March 3, 2017), and it assures learning is central to the PBL approach. Lapan et al., (2002) concluded that the success of partnerships was greater among those with administrative support from academia, which was understood to mean that the JWU decision to re-organize by bringing in EE&CS as a central administrator was likely to be favorable because they could streamline operations and share responsibility with faculty.

Dickeson (2010) reiterates that significant change can be political, and even after decisions have been finalized, interests and opinionated views can remain. Still, a stronger sense of competence is likely to surface within a team as both coordination and cooperation among stakeholders’ increases (Yukl, 2012). Strategic partnerships among internal and external members create “stakeholder learning collaboratives” (Jacobson, 2001, p.45) and promote communities of practice; “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1). Establishing collaborative connections, reliance on team interdependencies and previous project successes contribute to longer lasting relationships (Manning & Sydow, 2011).

Manning and Sydow (2011) claimed that sustaining partnerships and programs can be problematic in the long-term due to the temporary nature of most project work, and they urged “a more fine-grained and processual understanding of how project partners sustain project-based relationships and how they develop and leverage on partner resources and collaborative capabilities over time” (p. 1374). Organizational and operational processes must consider the implications of partnership because logistical concerns between partners reduces reliability term after term (Grant et al., 2010). Interdependent partnerships are a proactive measure in managing
stakeholders because they have been found to be critical players in the economic development of education, business and community (Cho & Brown, 2013; Harrison & St. John, 1996; Jacobson, 2001; U.S. Department of Commerce et al., 1999). Therefore,

it is imperative that academics strengthen this experience to maximize its potential benefit to the students and their preparation for successful careers. An essential element to strengthening this experience is providing students with adequate opportunities to practice and develop their soft skills as well as reinforce their technical skills. (Grant et al., 2010, p.15)

Merging the responsibility and allocating resources between stakeholders develops synergy and increases the effectiveness of partnerships and programs (Jacobson, 2001; Sengel, 2004).

Integration maximizes the knowledge, abilities, skills, and resources of team members (Williams, 2012). Stakeholders that share responsibilities permit efficient management of the teams’ functionality due to the exchange of complementary skills and abilities (Yukl, 2012, p. 86).

**Implications for Theory**

This case study described a long-term partnership between a University and a local Non-profit Organization, from a variety of internal and external stakeholder viewpoints. Donaldson and Preston’s (1995) second-order ST was used to guide the research and considered all three nested and inter-related, yet distinct aspects of the typology (See Figure 5) to gain a better understanding of strategic partnership and SE. To explain,

the external shell of the theory is its descriptive aspect; the theory presents and explains relationships that are observed in the external world. The theory's descriptive accuracy is supported, at the second level, by its instrumental and predictive value; if certain
practices are carried out, then certain results will be obtained. The central core of the
theory is, however, normative. (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p. 74)

In other words, the normative aspect reflects a system-centered position, while the instrumental
aspect or strategic focus is firm-centered (Sheehan, 2007). The researcher found that a dual-
mindset, or the ability for organizations to look at the big picture and the small picture, was
necessary to maximize the value of partnerships as well as to achieve the most favorable
program results; the descriptive aspect embodies the normative and instrumental aspects and
describes the actions of the bi-lateral (big picture and small picture) approach.

Figure 5. Three Aspects of Stakeholder Theory. From “The Stakeholder Theory of the Corporation:
Concepts, Evidence, and Implications”, by T. Donaldson and L. E. Preston, 1995, Academy of

ST was a useful theoretical framework for this study because it explains “the structure
and operations” of organizations (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p. 70). It also “asserts that inter-
firm relationships are a company’s most important assets” (Yu & Ramanathan, 2012 p. 373).

The normative aspect. The normative aspect, which investigates the motivations of
stakeholder collaboration, provided a lens through which to examine the moral behavior that
fueled collaborative efforts as well as how partnerships satisfied the needs of stakeholders. This
aspect speaks most to the second research sub-question: What purpose does an inter-
organizational arrangement serve? The organizations and associated stakeholders often acted
with moral perspectives in identifying personal and shared objectives, as well as in their decision making. One of the premises of the normative aspect is why stakeholders consider the needs of others. The mission and philosophical principals of both organizations were constructed on the needs of stakeholders, and many of JWU and SCCRI accolades are indicative of normative cores, thereby encompassing social and civic responsibility.

The JWU Faculty Members explained that they worked with non-profit organizations which were centered on engagement with SCCRI, because they believed it made the most ethical and business sense. It became obvious to the researcher that the decision to collaboratively engage was decided on by the participants because it was morally and functionally relevant to them, personally as well as organizationally. The Faculty Members and Project Partner in particular exuded strong characteristics of righteousness, and throughout the interviews it was realized how each of them viewed their formal position as a means to do something greater in the world. They found that the integration of resources had substantial impact on local higher education students, equipping them with the skills and experience for successful employment, as well as on the people of the Providence community, offering them safe avenues for cultural engagement and artistic expression.

The instrumental aspect. The instrumental aspect aided this research by describing the relationships between the organizations and their various stakeholder groups, in addition to the connections that existed between the groups themselves, relative to organizational goals and performance. This aspect speaks most to the central research question: How do a university and a non-profit organization engage in partnership to collaboratively manage PBL? The Administrator’s position in the partnership is representative of the instrumental aspect; it played
a significant role in the structure of operations as well as managing resources (including stakeholders) toward achievement.

Through an instrumental lens, the approach toward a newly improved structure and policies aligned the roles of stakeholders and effectively distributed resources in a systematic fashion. Each stakeholder group channeled its efforts toward individual goals (reporting, facilitating and mentoring) as well as collective goals (overall program outcomes linked to organizational expectations). The research revealed that collaboratively managing PBL improved performance through enhanced learning, employment prospects and positive institutional branding for JWU, and increased engagement, resource support, and operational excellence for SCCRI. Long-term collaborative partnerships were found by each of the participants to likely have an extensive effect on the viability and growth, not only for the organizations themselves, but also for the higher education system and community at large.

**The descriptive aspect.** The descriptive aspect helped to explain the actions of the involved organizations; this lens examined how stakeholders approached business, and it also assisted in understanding the influences of SE. It speaks most to the first research sub-question: What is the nature of the partnership? As participants explained their stake in the primary organizations they serve, as well as within the partnership, it was determined that they each acted in self-interest first (professionally then personally), cross-functionally next, and then inter-organizationally.

**Implications for Practice**

This study reaffirmed that SE and inter-organizational partnership is ideal for resource exchange. Integrated approaches add complexity to academic instruction, reflecting standard practices in project-centric industries and can also connect to the mission of the involved
organizations. PBL with non-profit project partners in particular, offers an effective way to embed the classroom with real-world situations while achieving a balanced and quality-driven approach to higher education, thereby offering students a practical opportunity in which to apply and develop knowledge, to better meet the demands of the modern workforce and to make positive contributions to society. Otherwise, faculty and students will continue to burn energy working toward time-bound assignments that have no real implications, such as projects that are fictitiously constructed, already solved, or even worse comprised of worthwhile ideas that never leave the classroom. Scholars and practitioners should capture that momentum and channel it in a way that maximizes its impact through sustainable results.

Partnerships driven by EE have the potential to provide long-term solutions to a multitude of current social issues: quality and credibility of education, student debt (return on investment); economic development (workforce/gainful employment); community engagement; and mental health (self-esteem, confidence, and self-gratification). Based on the investigation of the problem of practice in this study, the following recommendations have been suggested as changes to existing educational practice and policy:

**Recommendation 1: modify curriculum to include a required experiential education component.** Based on the investigation of the problem of practice for this research, the first recommendation is for academia to modify higher education curriculum to include a required EE component. If students were expected to complete PBL, capstone, independent study, and internship or cooperative education, it would make a significant improvement in workplace readiness and global citizenship. Moreover, if every student participated in even a single non-profit or community-based project during his or her academic career, unitedly it would make an impactful and sizeable difference with minimal resources. The research findings suggested that
partnerships to collaboratively manage PBL required the commitment and support of stakeholders (individuals and organizations) more than any other resource.

**Interdisciplinary collaboration.** To further enhance the quality of learning and mirror the expectations of industry, the researcher proposes the consideration of interdisciplinary collaboration that allows students from multiple majors to register for the same course, more than likely an upper-level course. Millar (2013) explained,

> While interdisciplinary education is not necessarily new, unique approaches are popping up across the country that recognize that modern problems such as climate change – messy, complex beasts that won’t be solved by a single field – require thinkers with a broad wisdom not limited to a single field. (para. 3)

Additionally, if proven effective by local, regional, national or international institutions, as well as the associated accrediting bodies and agencies, horizontal integration would engage faculty and students from distinct, yet similar institutions to form inter-institutional collaboration. This would be a proactive approach to higher education, because the literature prophesied that:

> The trend for the future will be more compact, targeted educational certificates and credits, which students will be able to pick and choose from to create their own academic portfolios. Take a math class from MIT, an engineering class from Purdue, perhaps with a course in environmental law from Yale, and create interdisciplinary education targeted to one’s own interests and career goals. Employers will be able to identify students who have done well in specific courses that match their needs. When people submit résumés to potential employers, they could include a list of these individual courses, and their achievement in them, rather than simply reference a degree and overall GPA. (Harden, 2012, para. 34)
As discovered in this study, a shift toward competency-based grading would be a worthwhile endeavor for EE components, even if it were not possible to implement in all courses. Competency-based grading more accurately assesses the knowledge, skills and abilities of students and pinpoints specific areas of improvement, thereby ensuring workplace readiness prior to graduation.

**Format flexibility.** Although this research advocated for EE through PBL, it does not mean that all courses must be structured in that way in order to be impactful. As Faculty B explained, “PBL, now it’s not for everybody. It’s not for every field. It’s not every everything” (personal communication, May 3, 2016); nevertheless, it was found to have worked well for the faculty in this case. For HEI that are interested in engaging with non-profit organizations or project partners, there are alternative approaches to those presented in this study. Instead of building brand new courses, it may be more conceivable to retrofit them (structure and outcomes) adequately to comply with PBL to reduce the amount of change (Jones et al., 2013). For example, faculty could begin with a *Single Site Model*, such as one partner and one project for the entire class, and then adjust it if they choose to as they become more comfortable. The JWU Library website provides extensive resources for interested faculty. It suggests four options for Single Site Models, including: consulting competition, in which groups are given the same project criteria and each compete for the project partner’s business; consulting angle model, in which the project is broken into components and divided up among the groups for completion; off-site model, in which groups propose and execute an a off-premise project; and an ongoing service model, in which students participate in weekly service at a community-based location and integrate their experience into course assignments (jwulibrary, n.d.-d).

Alternatively, as the second observation session revealed, seasoned faculty may elect a *Multiple*
*Site Model*, such as a consulting model where each group completes a similar project, but for multiple independent project partners (jwulibrary, n.d.-d). This is probably the more complex of the models because of its variation, but it exemplifies scalability.

Possibilities for the incorporation of PBL exists in online learning environments as well. Strait and Nordyke (2015) shared four emerging types of e-service-learning, including fully online and hybrid models, as useful examples. However, Stommel (2013) stated “very few online learning tools encourage the sorts of risk-taking that make for the best pedagogies” (para. 2). He suggested that “everything must be broken in order to be creatively and ethically rebuilt.

Everything. The course. The degree. Accreditation. Assessment. Rubrics. Standardized testing. Tenure. Intellectual property. FERPA. Peer review. The power dynamics of teachers and students” (para. 5). As trends continue to change in higher education, online learning has the potential to become commonplace and should not be left out of the conversation.

**Recommendation 2: recognize the importance of experiential education through project-based learning in the tenure and promotion process.** The literature as well as the Administrator and Faculty Members in this case expressed the challenge of time consumption and constraints, as well as dual loyalty in terms of the competing demands of higher education. This study showed that Faculty Members engaged with project partners because they felt deeply committed to the cause and effect of PBL; however often times participation and progress was derailed at the expense of faculty pursuing promotion or other forms of professional development. For example, Faculty C expressed the tension in having to choose between PBL or promotion, explaining “Last year I went up for a promotion, and that took a tremendous amount of my time. The process just sucked the life out of me, so I couldn't really take on anything else” (personal communication, April 3, 2017). While the Faculty Members in this case exert
themselves to balance the initiatives they find important, it was mentioned that many others avoid getting involved because of the effort required. PBL is “always perceived as so much work, and it is, I won’t lie” (Faculty C, personal communication, April 3, 2017). Tenure and promotion tend to drive decisions regarding where and how faculty commit their time and attention. If institutions recognize faculty contribution and investment in PBL with incentives for tenure and promotion, it would allow faculty to focus on developing partnerships and programs without cannibalizing career growth; more so, recognition is likely to incentivize additional faculty to participate. Still, often times as a result of tenure or promotion, faculty are expected to be more involved on campus and with professional organizations, but that also limits the time necessary to manage PBL with project partners; this issue leads to the next recommendation.

**Recommendation 3: permit workload adjustments to accommodate faculty participation.** The third recommendation is for HEI to adjust faculty workload to reflect the realistic time and bandwidth necessary to manage PBL with project partners. Just as many institutions substantiate time for research endeavors, so should they recognize EE through PBL as an asset and make accommodations for faculty participation to support these initiatives, particularly when PBL is confirmed with positive outcomes from involved stakeholders. Workload adjustments would reduce the burden on faculty, in turn permitting them to capitalize on the multi-dimensional value that authentic learning and strategic partnerships present. To illustrate, PBL is “always on my radar, but with my workload, I hesitate sometimes because I worry that it's not going to work out. I've done a lot of [PBL focused courses]. They are very time-consuming” (Faculty C, personal communication, April 3, 2017).
**Recommendation 4: allocate appropriate resources to promote innovation.** The fourth recommendation is for HEI to allocate resources that promote the innovation of education. Encouraging SE at the individual, group, organizational and inter-organizational level would increase shared knowledge and enhance PBL performance throughout the system:

**Individual.** Hiring the appropriate individuals would help foster organizational change toward more innovative approaches to education. Armstrong (n.d.) reaffirmed that change is difficult for both individuals and institutions, moreover,

Faculty traditionally control the educational process that is central to the higher education value proposition by defining, creating, and presenting the educational material used. Understandably, most are resistant to ideas of major change that would decrease their centrality, and very often to more minor business model changes (e.g. in pedagogy) that might lead to their feeling deskilled. (para. 2)

The research reported that faculty had an easier time adapting to new methods of teaching when they have had previous experience or remained active in the industry. Institutions could ensure that faculty possess adequate industry experience upon hire; otherwise, if academic attainment prevails, then faculty should be open to gaining first-hand field exposure with the intent of influencing the classroom to be a reflection and up-to-date depiction of industry expectations. Luft (1997) identified such programs as *Educator Externships in Business and Industry*, and argued that without the ability for facilitators to experience industry themselves, and questioned how they would be expected to provide relevant career information and incorporate operational concepts into the curriculum to accurately prepare students for the workforce without being able to experience industry for themselves.
**Group.** Opportunities for teaching consultations between administrators or experienced faculty and inexperienced but interested faculty could result in shared understanding. Formal learning could demystify modern teaching formats, address assumptions and minimize learning curves between the groups and in general. Consultations have the potential to increase success and spread awareness to attract new users to continue growing PBL partnerships and programs.

**Organizational.** Both the participants in this study as well as the literature surrounding the topic of PBL called attention to the importance of collaboration through networking. Networking is an “excellent way for faculty and students to garner internships and employment as well as project opportunities for students” Grant et al., 2010, p. 172). HEI could allocate time and space for on-campus stakeholder collaboratives, an interactive way for administrators and faculty to initiate and develop professional working relationships while encouraging informal learning. Stakeholder collaboratives would provide a space to share experiences and best practices, improve common processes, and allow for the freedom to innovate. This study revealed that JWU was revitalizing its faculty center, an ideal location to provide supportive PBL resources. Similarly, Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts invests in the Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning Through Research, which offers “opportunities for faculty to broaden their perspectives on teaching and learning and apply strategies grounded in research to optimize learning” (Northeastern University, n.d., para. 1).

**Inter-organizational.** Stakeholder collaboratives also have the applicability to involve external organizations from non-profit, business and government sectors. Alternatively, Rittenburg, Miller, Rust, Esler, Kreider, Boylan, and Squires (2015) explained an option for inter-organizational integration with a summit approach, which connected stakeholders from education, businesses, non-profits, the community and government to judge the results of year-
long PBL commitments from three classes at five different schools. PBL provides a way for stakeholders from various organizations to directly influence the approach and outcomes of higher education. Forward integration was found to be a logical choice in engaging the workforce and higher education (productive employees), and community and higher education (productive citizens) because the stakeholders have aligned objectives and resources.

At an institutional level, another idea for inter-organizational collaboration is for faculty and project partners to participate in a brief orientation prior to official engagement. Orientation sessions could be flexible and take place in person, over the phone, or using technology, and would act as a touch point, which was found in this study to develop trust and increase the likelihood of partnerships turning into long-term collaborations. It also allows expectations to be clarified and any major issues to be sorted prior to involving students. For students, this research suggested that the facilitator leading the course as well as the project partner discuss their expectations collectively as well as independently, in order to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Pre-assessments and post-assessments would provide an opportunity to anchor conversations.

**Recommendation 5: develop an internal and external marketing campaign to increase awareness, generate leads and solidify branding.** Observation suggested that students agree that PBL required more work, but nonetheless acknowledged it as beneficial to their academic and professional career. Many students even shared their disappointment in not participating earlier and expressed desire to register in the future. The CEE and DEE programs at JWU are elective, but the data advocated that students who self-select programs are more likely to be engaged, while this appears to contradict recommendation number one (required engagement), based on the outcomes of this study as organizations continue learning and
students assimilate to culture shifts, EE through PBL has the potential to become the norm in higher education environments.

To increase the awareness of PBL’s value, the fifth and final recommendation is for institutions to develop effective marketing campaigns. Amaral and Matsusaki (2016) agreed, and suggested that sharing project success stories is a valid approach to assist with “paradigm-breaking” (p. 7), in other words converting traditional learners to authentic learners. Project success stories demonstrate the possibilities for students and verify accomplishment, while also “breaking [student] resistance to a PBL-centered course” (Amaral & Matsusaki, 2016, p. 7).

Likewise, the Administrator aspires to collect success stories as means to encourage campus-wide engagement and generate leads. As an extension of JWU’s promotional phase to fully implement CEE and DEE, marketing could promote the program internally to faculty and students, as well as externally to attract project partners and clients, and to solidify the University’s brand, re-invigorating its reputation for EE through a new avenue of PBL.

**Recruitment possibilities.** Institutionally based, JWU has adjusted its website to receive project proposals from potential partners directly, but recruitment varies institutionally. To save time and money, if HEI have existing internship and job boards then its infrastructure and related technological systems may have potential to be augmented for project intake and distribution as well. To explain, administrators, faculty and/ or project partners could input the details and requirements of a project and post opportunities, that way students can be matched based on their major, interests, skill level, and so on, just as they would for an internship or job; this suggestion acts as an engagement connector for stakeholders. On a national or international level, institutions could build upon this concept and horizontally integrate to achieve inter-institutional collaboration.
Implications for Research

This study can be used as the basis for numerous future research possibilities to better understand strategic partnerships between higher education and project partners, including population expansion as well as alternative research designs and paradigms. While this study focused on a well-rounded approach with input from multiple stakeholder groups, a supplementary direction building on this research would be to focus on a specific group. Sense (2013) argued “for the project sponsor [project partner] role to be acknowledged as dynamic and interactive and a dramatic influence on project practice-based learning” (p. 264). Additionally, a study from an employer standpoint might help to uncover changes in the skills gap or recruitment efforts upon student completion of PBL. It is advantageous for HEI to know how employers assess and value PBL approaches to education.

A study looking at strategic partnership through a student lens before, during and/or after the PBL experience, to understand how PBL impacted their educational experience, employment opportunities and social responsibility would present a well-rounded view of the phenomenon described in this case study. There is also extensive opportunity to explore partnership and program impressions of international students, particularly since they are only eligible as students in the United States to legally gain work-like experiences through credit-bearing courses. PBL presents international student populations with a practical option aside from curricular practical training, assuming programs have credits available to be utilized in that way.

Qualitative prospects that expand research to understand stakeholders (individually) or partners (collectively) in different majors, centers, colleges, schools, departments, campuses, universities, regions or countries exist and might work well as a comparative case study. For instance, research could focus on how project-based approaches are put into practice by
stakeholders or how leadership institutionalizes this form of innovative practice and education.

Quantitative research potential also exists, for example a correlation design might determine if a relationship exists between the following two variables: integrated PBL between HEI and organizations or businesses and gainful employment.

An alternative paradigm could also be considered, according to Ponterotto (2005) the critical ideological paradigm contests conventional methods and serves to disrupt and challenge the status quo by centering on particular societal or cultural groups who may be or have been disempowered or mediated by a difference in power. Rose and Paisley (2012) conducted a critical analysis and argued that EE is a “privileged pedagogy” (p. 136), perhaps a detailed research study within the paradigm of critical theory could emphasize the challenges that the lower socioeconomic demographic population faces when involved in strategic partnerships and PBL.

Limitations

While common in qualitative research, this study purposely relied on a small participant sample that reflected the key stakeholder groups. Nevertheless, the possibility that the ideas of the participants may not reflect the varied experiences of other administrators, faculty and project partners is considered a limitation. This study is further limited by the nature of the sites involved, in that this research highlighted a decade-long strategic partnership bound to this particular case, which detailed the inter-organizational efforts between JWU’s Providence Campus and SCCRI. Both the University and Non-profit Organization have unique missions, strategies and viewpoints, which may separate them from other seemingly comparable establishments, so the findings may not be transferable.

The document review and interview process collected as well as analyzed data that covered the span of the partnerships past, present and future, whereas the observations were
based on the project work being conducted at that time, distinct to a particular course, major and college within JWU. As with most qualitative studies, generalization and repeatability beyond these instances may be restricted. Limitations also exist because the researcher is an internal employee at JWU. Although she is not directly involved with PBL or associated faculty in any formal capacity, the current program is supported by EE&CS, the department in which the researcher works; the researcher recognizes that because of the level of acquaintance, the closeness to the subject, and relationship to the site, she had the potential to bias interpretations.

Summary

Chapter 5 concluded this descriptive case study by demonstrating the dedication and commitment on behalf of multiple internal and external stakeholder groups. It described the long-term partnership between JWU and SCCRI, which continues to impact a variety of stakeholder groups relative to HEI, community organizations, the Rhode Island community itself, and local government agencies. These involved stakeholders assume a “multi-dimensional approach to instigating social change” (ArtPlace, 2016c, para. 1), attesting that they “see worth in investing our time, education, and efforts to better our world” (SouthLight Design Build, n.d., para. 20). The research process revealed that strategic inter-organizational partnerships may be a critical factor for improving the overall significance as well as survival of modern day education, but a whole-system strategy, to which stakeholder groups are fully committed, is necessary to achieve holistic change.

Utilizing ST as a guide, this study provided a detailed look into partnership, program, and engagement practices as viewed through the various stakeholder lenses. As a result, the following seven themes emerged in the data: (1) stakeholder alignment; (2) engagement as a result of individual interests and organizational commitment; (3) characteristics of stakeholders
that contribute to the cohesiveness of partnership; (4) system-wide support; (5) reciprocity of interconnected stakeholders; (6) dynamics warranting continued stakeholder engagement; and (7) dedication to reimagining the delivery of education. The themes were reduced to three conclusions: (A) stakeholder alignment deepens engagement by increasing the longevity of partnership and maximizing the reach of impact; (B) the effectiveness of partnership is enhanced when resources are shared within the university and across the non-profit organization; and (C) faculty are the driving force of pedagogical change and are central to the sustainability of partnership. The conclusions derived from the key findings led the researcher to propose practical recommendations and multiple suggestions for consideration by the following stakeholder groups: HEI, industry, community organizations and government agencies. This study provided insight into the problem of practice, as it helped to clarify how partnership between invested stakeholders minimizes the theoretical and practical misalignment in education. The research addressed the study’s purpose, which was to understand the long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization by describing the interactions and influences of stakeholders collaboratively managing PBL.

Conclusion

In closing, pertinent stakeholder groups have work to do in graduating students that meet modern labor and workforce demands; for many industries, this means accessibility to candidates with an ideal combination of theoretical, technical, and transferable skills. The ability for graduates to secure prosperous entry-level employment remains a challenge for many constituents. This study affirmed that PBL with project partners equips students with a solid base line of experience necessary to compete for financially and self-fulfilling employment, as well as raises the awareness of social responsibility. Strategic partnerships defray obstacles by
integrating resources to provide students with a platform that unifies theory and practice, moreover, they authenticate teaching objectives and learning outcomes (Alba, 2014).

The participants in this study have independently and collectively aligned operational activities to achieve smaller objectives as part of larger outcomes, in sync with the mission and values of their individual organizations. PBL in particular aligns with the JWU mission, values, learning outcomes and strategic plan, as the University agrees to “undertake continuous improvement and planning for a sustainable future” (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-b, para. 3). EE develops the talent pipeline, and it helps organizations and businesses sustain competitive strength for future success (Giordani, 2012). The long-term partnership described in this case study has proven to be a successful venture for the Faculty Members and the Project Partner, all of whom plan to continue active engagement with each other in both the near and distant future.
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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approvals

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: February 3, 2017    IRB #: CPS17-01-02
Principal Investigator(s): Tova Sanders
                        Kristin Wakefield
Department: Doctor of Education Program
            College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
         Northeastern University
Title of Project: Stakeholder Engagement: A Case Study of a Long-term Partnership between a University and Non-profit Organization
Participating Sites: Johnson & Wales University approval forthcoming
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
                        Exempt #4
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: FEBRUARY 2, 2018

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection
February 20, 2017

Kristen Wakefield  
Student Career Advisor, Experiential Education & Career Services  
Johnson & Wales University  
8 Abbott Park Place  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Kristen,

As the chairperson of Johnson & Wales University’s Research Review Committee I am pleased to inform you that the committee has approved your research proposal entitled “Stakeholder Engagement: A Case Study of a Long-term Partnership between a University and Non-profit Organization.” All JWU internally controlled documents incorporated in the project must be released by the authorized document custodians. A list of all internally controlled documents along with the authorizing signatures from document custodians must be provided to the research review committee prior to any information being included in your research materials from these documents.

This approval requires that you adhere to the research protocol submitted in your proposal. Any changes to the submitted protocol will require that you resubmit your proposal to the research review committee for approval. This approval is valid for one year from the date of this letter unless a renewal is submitted for review by the committee at least thirty days prior to that date. As a committee we wish you the best with your research.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

George J. Rezendes, Ph.D.  
Director of Institutional Research &  
Chair of University Research Review Committee  
Email george.rezendes@jwu.edu
Appendix B

Request to Participate

Hello,

My name is Kristin Wakefield and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University focusing on education and organizational leadership studies.

I am interested in studying university partnerships with external organizations. Johnson & Wales University and the Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island have had a long-term engagement, and I would like to understand more about this partnership. For example, I would like to know more about when/how and why the partnership formed, how it functions, as well as how it has evolved over time and future prospects. The hope is that this research can be used to inform professional practice by helping other higher education institutions and non-profit organizations adopt successful inter-organizational arrangements.

I am asking you to participate in this study because of your current role, professional credentials and experience with project-based learning. As an exemplar, I would very much appreciate 30-45 minutes of your time to participate in a one-on-one, audio-recorded interview along with your willingness to share your experiences from a [administrator, faculty, or project partner] point of view.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and if you decide to participate you can withdraw at any time during the interview process without negative consequences. Your identity will be kept completely confidential, unless you choose otherwise and would prefer public recognition. After the interviews are conducted participants will be asked for feedback and have the opportunity to review the findings for accuracy. Every participant will sign an informed consent form which outlines the details of the study as well as the participant’s role.

If you are comfortable with the nature and purpose of this study and would like to participate please contact me directly by email at wakefield.k@husky.neu.edu

I would be more than happy to discuss the study in greater detail and I am willing to answer any questions or concerns.

Warmest regards,

Kristin Wakefield

Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University

wakefield.k@husky.neu.edu
Appendix C

Signed Informed Consent Document

Institution: Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Tova Olson Sanders, Principal Investigator
                     Kristin Wakefield, Student Researcher

Title of Project: Stakeholder Engagement: A Case Study of a Long-term Partnership
                 Between a University and a Non-profit Organization

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study:
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but first it will be explained to you in person. You can ask any questions that you have and when you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. Participation is voluntary; you do NOT have to participate if you do not want to. If you do decide to terminate your participation, simply inform the researcher of your decision and no negative consequences will result. If you do decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep for your records.

Why is this research study being done?
Under the direction of the principal investigator, the student researcher is interested in conducting a qualitative case study to understand the long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization by describing the influences and interactions of stakeholders collaboratively managing project-based learning. Johnson & Wales University and the Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island have had a long-term engagement, and the researcher would like to know more about this partnership. For example, when/how and why it formed, how it functions, as well as how it has evolved over time and future prospects. The hope is that this research can be used to inform professional practice by helping other higher education institutions and non-profit organizations adopt successful inter-organizational arrangements.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this study because of your current role, professional credentials and relationship to the sites. Each of the participants span a continuous range of six to twelve years of experience with project-based learning between the two sites.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you answer a series of interview questions allowing you to share your personal opinions and insights. The interview will be recorded, it will be audio taped to capture the information accurately and allow the researcher to focus on what you are saying without having to take notes the entire time. The recording will be transcribed; in other words, it will be typed word for word into a document that way the researcher can better understand it, because it will be easier to see the information instead of having to listen to it.
Once this is done, you will be asked to look over the text in the document for possible changes. You will have the opportunity to check that the information is true and that you feel comfortable sharing it in the way that it is presented.

We also request that you share any documents or supplemental information based on you and your employer’s discretion, that you think would be helpful to the researchers in understanding university and external organization partnerships better. If possible, the researcher would appreciate attending at least one meeting that is related to or involves the work done by a higher education Administrator, Faculty and a Project Partner.

**Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?**

The research will take place at a time and location that is convenient for you. The initial interview will last approximately 35-45 minutes. Although not required, shorter follow-up conversations may be necessary to update or clarify the information. In total, your participation in this study will take approximately three to five hours at most.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. You will not be paid or receive any remuneration for your service, it is completely voluntary. However, this is an opportunity for you to share your passion, views and experiences with a wider, public audience. Your feedback could help us to learn more about university and external organization partnerships.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There is no cost for participating in this study.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me? Who will see the information about me?**

There are no likely risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There is a minor possibility for the loss of confidentiality, meaning that because of your level of commitment and at times public involvement with project-based learning connected to Johnson & Wales University, there is a chance that readers could associate you with the case. To minimize this risk, fake names will be used for participants and programs as well as in the place of any specific identifiers that would directly connect you to this research. Only the researchers will know for sure that you participated in this study. Your involvement will be handled in a confidential manner. Any reports or publications based on this research will not identify you as being part of the project.

However, if you wish to be openly recognized and acknowledged in the published research, which will be accessible to a public audience, you may choose to use your real name by granting the researchers permission below. This is your choice and NOT a requirement for the study.

*Please initial your choice:*

I provide permission to use my real name in this research study: ________

I prefer to keep my identity confidential: ________
The information collected from your involvement will either be stored on the researcher’s encrypted laptop or in a locked file cabinet when not in their direct possession. All raw data including audio recordings, interview transcripts and related notes will be destroyed within three to five years after the study’s publication.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Yes, the decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any and all of the questions. Even if you begin the study, you may stop at any time without issues, judgement or prejudice.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Kristin Wakefield at wakefield.k@husky.neu.edu or 774-226-3635, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Tova Sanders, the Principal Investigator and advisor for the research at T.Sanders@northeastern.edu or 202-549-3240.

**If you have any questions about your rights in this research,** you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Phone: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**I agree to take part in this research study. I have read the consent form. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. My signature below indicates that I understand the information and that I consent to participate in this study.**

__________________________________________  ______________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part            Date

__________________________________________
Printed name of person above

__________________________________________  ______________________
Signature of the person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent            Date

__________________________________________
Printed name of person above

IRB# CPS17-01-02
Approved: 2/3/17
Expiration Date: 2/2/18
# Appendix D
## Data Collection Plan and Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIMELINE</th>
<th>Document Review:</th>
<th>Interview #1: Internal Stakeholder, Administrator</th>
<th>Interview #2, 3 &amp; 4: Internal Stakeholders, Faculty</th>
<th>Interview #5: External Stakeholder, Project Partner</th>
<th>Observation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### Central Question: Stakeholder Engagement

How do a university and a non-profit organization engage in partnership to collaboratively manage project-based learning?

### Sub-question 1: Nature of the Partnership

What is the nature of the partnership?

### Sub-question 2: Purpose

What purpose does an inter-organizational arrangement serve?

### External Data:

#### Strategic Plans:
- Does the characteristics mentioned in the mission and values of the organizations align? Do they emphasize SE or PBL?

#### Websites, Awards, Magazine Publications, Published Projects, & News Articles:
- What are the organizational structures? Who is involved and how are they connected?
- What are the operational processes? How is the program managed and how does it operate?
- How are the partnerships and programs marketed?
- What is at stake?
- What are the major outcomes/achievements of the partnership?

#### Course Catalogs & Curriculum:
- How is the program structured?
- Who is involved?
- When and how do the partners engage? What is the frequency of engagement?
- What is at stake?
- How are arrangements made with different projects each term?
- How are the partnerships and programs marketed?

#### Operational Processes:
- How is the partnership and associated programs structured? How do they operate?
- When and how do the partners engage? What is the frequency of engagement?
- How does each partner view the effectiveness of PBL? What are factors of success?
- What are suggestions for improvement?
- What are outcomes of the partnership?

#### Organizational Structures:
- Who is involved? Who provides leadership?

## Multiple stakeholders involved:

*See observation protocol for data collection details.*

- In what ways do the stakeholders engage?
- What is the nature of the partnership?
- Why do they collaboratively engage?
Appendix E
Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preliminary Information</th>
<th>Participant background information collected prior to each interview:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Position/title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Roles and responsibilities in the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Length of employment with the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mission of the organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Introductory Statement  | Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study and for taking the time to talk with me today. I truly appreciate it. Also, I want to thank you for confirming by email your employment history and demographic information. It will save time here today.  
I’m interested in studying university partnerships with external organizations. Johnson & Wales University and the Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island have had a long-term engagement, and I would like to understand more about when/how and why this formed, how it functions, as well as how it has evolved over time and future prospects. The hope is that this research can be used to inform professional practice by helping other higher education institutions and non-profit organizations adopt successful inter-organizational arrangements.  
Before we begin, I would like to review a few considerations with you: |
|                         | (a) The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I plan to cover. Therefore, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to stay on target and complete the line of questioning. Also, there may be times where I probe you to go deeper in your explanations. |
|                         | (b) With your permission and approval, the transcript from this interview will be used for my dissertation. The ideas discussed will not be analyzed in anyway aside from gaining an understanding of strategic partnership and stakeholder engagement, as well as the awareness of similar and differing standpoints. |
|                         | (c) The information shared today is confidential; its integrity will not be misconstrued. The aim is to record information and knowledge shared today as accurately as possible. Therefore, I will give you a copy of both the interview transcript as well as a copy of the way I present your words for editing prior to formal submission. |
|                         | (d) Additionally, your responses are important and I want to capture everything you say, I would like to ask for your permission to record this interview so that I can focus better on our conversation. Is that okay? |
|                         | (e) Finally, I want you to know that your participation in this study is voluntary. You will have the right to respond to only those questions that you feel comfortable with and have the option to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice or negative consequences. |
|                         | (f) Are there any questions before we begin? Also, feel free to ask questions throughout the interview should they arise. |

Thank you again for your participation. I appreciate your insight and assistance with this research. If you agree with the objective, potential outcomes and are a willing participant please sign the statement of informed consent for my records. If you are fine with everything so far, I will then turn on the recorder and we will begin the interview.
| Question # 1 | Tell me about the partnership between JWU & SCCRI?  
| What is your understanding of how it started?  
| How has it evolved?  
| What is it like now?  
| What influenced the changes?  |
| Question # 2 | How are the projects and partnerships managed?  
| How are project arrangements made each term?  
| Who is involved in the decision making when program and/or projects have to be adjusted?  
| How do the partners discuss the extent that the current arrangement is meeting its goals?  
| If there's a disagreement between the university and organization, what's the process for resolving it?  |
| Question # 3 | How do you view the effectiveness of collaboratively managed project-based learning?  
| What factors influence the success of long-term project partnerships?  
| What factors hinder the success of long-term project partnerships?  
| How would you describe project-based learning success?  |
| Question # 4 | What advice would you give others trying to establish or develop long-term partnerships between higher education institutions and non-profit organizations?  
| Question # 5 | Now I’d like to have you think about the future of this partnership. Imagine it's 5 years from now and this partnership has been identified as an exemplar. There's a feature article about this long-term partnership:  
| What’s the headline and how would you outline the story?  
| What are the features (outcomes/achievements) of the story: who, what, when, where, why, how,.....  |
| Wrap Up Question | Is there anything that I left out in terms of partnerships or any others areas of consideration?  
| Closing Statement | As we close the interview today, I would like to reiterate my gratitude for your participation. I will be sending you a copy of the transcript shortly for your review to confirm and clarify the information in case I have failed to capture anything accurately.  
| Would you mind if I contacted you should I have any additional questions or need clarification regarding any of your responses? Would you prefer I contact you via email or telephone?  
| Sometime over the next few weeks, I will email you a word-for-word transcript. You may choose to review the information, and will have one week to provide me with any feedback, alterations, or corrections. Can you please confirm the email address you would like for me to email the transcripts to?  
| Also, once the dissertation is complete, which will most likely be 3-6 months from now, would you like to receive an electronic copy of the document?  
| Do you have any final questions for me? Thank you again. |
Appendix F

Observation Protocol

Background Information

My name is Kristin Wakefield and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University focusing on education and organizational leadership studies. I am also a Career Advisor in Experiential Education & Career Services at Johnson & Wales University.

I'm interested in studying university partnerships with external organizations. Johnson & Wales University and the Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island have had a long-term arrangement, and I would like to understand more about when/how and why this formed, how it functions, as well as how it has evolved over time. The hope is that this research can be used to inform professional practice by helping other higher education institutions and non-profit organizations in adopting successful inter-organizational arrangements.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the long-term partnership between a university and a non-profit organization by describing the influences and interactions of stakeholder engagement.

Objective of Observation

To enhance this understanding and to further validate previously collected data, I will be participating as an observer during today’s session.

A few points of consideration:

- Observation is confidential; no actual names will be identified and pseudonyms will be applied if pertinent.

- Notes will be recorded only when the discussion is relevant to the case, in that it is related to stakeholder engagement, strategic partnerships, and project-based learning.

- Notes will be made available to those participants who request them.

Please feel free to voice any questions, concerns or curiosities. Thank you for allowing me to take advantage of this opportunity,

Kristin Wakefield

Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University

wakefield.k@husky.neu.edu
DEE3999 Directed Experiential Education

Directed Experiential Education (DEE) offers students an intensive, term-long, project-based experiential learning opportunity conducted under the supervision of a faculty member. Experiences are driven by a specific industry-based or functional-area-based project completed for a nonprofit or for-profit DEE partner. Through weekly group seminar meetings, extensive field work (independent and/or group-based) and purposeful reflection, students apply acquired discipline-specific skills and knowledge, develop leadership and collaborative abilities, and refine critical thinking, problem-solving and active citizenship skills. The course culminates in a formal presentation to the DEE partner. This course is recognized as an Experiential Education (EE) course, indicating that experiential learning is used as a primary method of achieving the course objectives. Students can take up to three terms of this course at 4.5 credits per term.

Prerequisite(s): Faculty recommendation and approval by the department chair. Offered at Charlotte, Denver, North Miami, Online, Providence, PVD CE. 4.5 Quarter Credit Hours (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-g).

DWE3999 Directed Work Experience

The Directed Work Experience offers students an experiential learning opportunity for the application of acquired skills and knowledge in a supervised project oriented setting. The focus of these experiences revolves around a specific industry-based or a functional area-based project under the supervision of a faculty member. Offered at Charlotte, Denver, North Miami, Providence, PVD CE. 1.5-13.5 Quarter Credit Hours (Johnson & Wales University, n.d.-h).