DETERMINANTS OF GIVING TO HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family:

Terry II and TJ, the loves of my life

Terry, my husband, and biggest supporter

And my parents,

Lionel and Violet

Thank you all for your prayers.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

As I awaited the decision two years ago from the Admissions Committee of UPenn’s Executive Doctorate Program, I developed a sense of peace as the decision date neared. I came to believe that if it was God’s will, I would be accepted into the Exec Doc Program, a program that I had researched more than a decade prior and wanted to attend. Today, I thank God that He provided me with this amazing experience and that I was able to fulfill a lifelong dream of getting a doctorate degree in education. I thank Him for seeing me through and placing so many people in my life who believed in me and supported me even before I began this journey.

First, I would like to thank my husband, Terry Grimes. I remember so clearly the night and the restaurant we were in when we were dating. You asked me about my dreams and I shared with you that I wanted to get a doctorate one day. I believe you have always remembered that conversation and in recent years you have encouraged me to fulfill that dream. Thank you for being a mom and dad at times over these past two years to our sons. You did it with ease and aplomb.

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to save your money so you could have a graduation party for me. That so warmed my heart. Terry, you so proudly wore the UPenn gear to school and shared with everyone who would listen that I was getting my doctorate. The confidence that you both had in me gave me the resolve I needed during the hardest times of this journey.

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you and know that your scholarship is an inspiration not only to me but to so many others in higher education and beyond.
ABSTRACT

DETERMINANTS OF GIVING
TO HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

Althea A. Forde
Marybeth Gasman

This study set out to examine factors that influence and motivate foundations in their decision-making strategies to support Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and how decisions are shaped by the identity, characteristics, and institutional advancement offices at these institutions of higher learning. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with program officers from foundations that ranged in size from one staff member to more than 25. Some of these foundations were ranked in the Top 50 for Total Giving and the Top 50 for Total Assets, according to the Foundation Center. My primary finding showed that foundations reflect an ethos of care for institutions that serve low-income, first-generation, and minority students (students they care about). Four subthemes also emerged, all related to my overarching finding pertaining to the ethos of care. First, the HSI identity per se is not a determinant in foundation giving to HSIs, although foundations are certainly committed to supporting low-income, first-generation, and minority students. The second theme is that institutional advancement offices impact foundation giving to a lesser extent than anticipated. On the other hand, the reputation, accomplishments, and vision of presidents and institutional leaders were represented as potential deciding factors for foundations’ grant-making decisions. Third, many
foundations are engaging in “strategy resets,” rethinking how they have worked in the past and moving in the direction of increased collaboration at multiple levels, resulting in a more highly networked landscape of higher education and philanthropy. Last, foundations are simultaneously interested in both student success and institutional transformation. Overall, foundations give to higher education primarily because they see this as a way to promote social justice and equity for the students they care about—first-generation, low-income, and minority students. As a result of this study, institutions such as HSIs that serve these students can gain a better understanding of how foundations are thinking about and approaching their work for the students they care about. This study augments the currently sparse literature related to foundation giving to HSIs.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There has been a steady increase in population growth among Hispanics in America, making them the fastest-growing racial/ethnic demographic in the United States (Laden, n.d.). According to the U.S. Census in 2018, it is projected that during the next four decades, the Hispanic population will more than double. As a result, the number of Hispanic students pursuing higher education will increase. Already, 40% of Hispanics 25 years of age or older indicate having some college experience, with higher college experience rates reported among U.S.-born Hispanics (52%) (Flores, 2017). In view of such data, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) have become central in increasing Latino access to college and improving their social mobility (Laden, n.d.). HSIs are defined by the federal government in the Higher Education Act of 1965 as accredited, degree-granting institutions with 25% enrollment of Hispanic students (“U.S. Department,” 2016; Laden, n.d.). These institutions have been a source of concern for educators, policymakers, and practitioners because they are both unknown and not understood (Laden, n.d.). Yet, current data indicate that HSIs educate approximately 64% of Hispanic students in American higher education and graduate about 40% of all Hispanic students (“A primer on Hispanic,” 2017). Despite these numbers, Latino students lag behind blacks and whites in postsecondary enrollment, attainment, and overall earnings (Carnevale & Fasules, 2017).

The exponential growth of the Hispanic population has significant implications for the United States, insofar as educating the Hispanic population is critical for meeting
national economic goals and maintaining global competitiveness (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Flores, 2011; Liu & Liu, 2012; Nellum & Valle, 2015; Santiago, 2012). Great strides are being made by HSIs in increasing the Hispanic graduation rate. Analysis of data from the National Student Clearinghouse by Garcia & Taylor (2017) indicates that exclusively full-time Hispanic students attending public and private institutions graduate within six years at 71.1% and 77.9%, respectively, as compared with the federal graduation rate of 42.7% and 49.1%, respectively. Unfortunately, although these rates appear more than promising, the majority of Latino students vacillate between full-time and part-time status (Garcia & Taylor, 2017). And, according to Excelencia in Education’s analysis of the 2015-2016 American Community Survey, around 22% of adult Latinos have attained an associate’s degree or beyond.

Although great strides have been made by HSIs in educating Latino students, historically institutions with high Hispanic enrollment have been underfunded and at the bottom of federal funding priorities for higher education (Malcom, Bensimon, & Davila, 2010). On average, these institutions receive less on the dollar ($0.69) than their peer institutions (Drezner & Villarreal, 2015; Garcia & Taylor, 2017; “National Campaign on the Return on Investments,” 2017). Approximately 10 years ago, the nation had 280 HSIs, and those institutions received in aggregate $227 million in federal appropriations. Five years later, the number of HSIs increased to 435. Yet, despite a 55% increase in the number of HSIs, the federal appropriation actually decreased to $216 million (“National Campaign on the Return on Investments,” 2017; Nellum & Valle, 2015). Concurrently, these institutions are also experiencing funding restraint from the state, resulting in
increased competition for decreased funding (Cox, 2011; Garcia & Taylor, 2017). Some scholars even believe state support for higher education will end in about 50 years (Hebel, 2014; Mortenson, 2012). Such predictions are seen as “particularly dangerous for HSIs because they are typically unable to generate enough supplemental revenue (i.e. endowments) to offset losses in government support” (Nellum & Valle, 2015, p. 5).

The trend of decreased federal and state funding does not bode well for the long-term financial health of HSIs and, by default, the students they serve. Research clearly suggests that greater institutional resources contribute to improved student outcomes with regard to persistence and graduation for Hispanic students (Garcia & Taylor, 2017). In general, inadequate resources lead to loss of institutional capacity to respond to change; loss of academic, research, or other staff, particularly the best staff; lower staff allegiance and morale; erosion of equipment, including computers, laboratory equipment, and library materials; deterioration of physical plant; and inability to expand physical capacity to keep up with increasing enrollment (Johnstone, 2002, p. 22). Decreases in resources and institutional capacity will require other sources of revenue (Drezner & Villarreal, 2015; Garcia & Taylor, 2017; Johnstone, 2002).

Conceivably, HSIs could make up for waning state and federal support through philanthropic support. Unfortunately, many HSIs have not developed a sophisticated understanding of the voluntary-support landscape, and many of these institutions have neither cultivated a substantial number of individual donors or developed the pipelines to access alternative revenue streams owing to their almost-total reliance on state and federal funds through the years. This has resulted in HSIs being late to the game of
institutional development (Drezner, 2011). Moreover, HSIs often do not have the infrastructure, in the form of larger numbers of institutional advancement offices, to cultivate private giving. According to Brustmann (2012), establishing a culture of giving can be challenging for institutions that do not have a history of fundraising.

More than 15 years ago, Mulnix, Bowden, and Lopez (2002) observed that little had been written on the subject of Hispanic higher education and that no research had been conducted on institutional advancement for HSIs. Mulnix, Bowden, and Lopez (2002) conducted an ERIC database search on HSIs and institutional advancement from 1966 to 2002. They found less than a dozen articles or book chapters on the topic of HSIs and advancement. Today, the literature about institutional advancement for HSIs remains almost non-existent. There is, however, a growing body of literature concerned with Hispanic alumni giving but little about other types of giving that would create a pipeline for additional revenue (Acosta, 2010; Cauda, 2014; Lucka, 2015; Murillo, 2003; O’Connor, 2007). This lack of research regarding HSIs and advancement activities indicates not only a gap but a gaping hole in higher education scholarship at a time when voluntary support for HSIs has never been more important, owing to their vulnerability to changes in state and federal appropriations (Garcia & Taylor, 2017). To contribute to the limited scholarship about HSIs and giving, this study will explore the determinants of giving by private foundations to HSIs and the role of the HSI advancement office in private foundations’ decision-making process.

In general, extensive scholarship exists related to foundations and their involvement in, and giving to, higher education. Today’s literature paints a complex
relationship between institutions and these voluntary funding sources that have both positive and negative dimensions. Some commentators highlight the ways in which foundations are commandeering the higher education agenda, demanding accountability for the ways in which allocated funds are spent. In contrast, others believe that foundations are driving innovative change in higher education because higher education lacks the leadership to make those changes. Regardless of one’s stance on the role of foundations in higher education, they undoubtedly provide a significant source of funding to higher education institutions. According to the Council of Aid to Education, in 2017 foundations provided $13.13 billion in voluntary support to higher education, which was the highest of all the categories of voluntary giving (see Table 1). Foundation giving outstripped the next-largest category of giving, alumni, by 4%. Therefore, the significant role that foundations play in higher education suggests that it is necessary to develop an understanding of the drivers for foundation giving to HSIs.

Table 1: Voluntary Support of Higher Education by Source, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>$11.37</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonalumni individuals</td>
<td>$7.86</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporations</td>
<td>$6.60</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td>$13.13</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Organizations</td>
<td>$4.64</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Voluntary Support of Higher Education by Source, 2017

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Source: Council for Aid to Education, 2018
Purpose of Study

In higher education, not all institutions are equal. Heavily resourced institutions that serve students with generally low financial need have the option of raising tuition as an additional stream of revenue. In contrast, increasing tuition is not an ideal option for HSIs that are under-resourced. Higher tuition will significantly limit college access for the students most likely to enroll at these HSIs, as many are lower-income (Drezner & Villarreal, 2015; Garcia & Taylor, 2017). Further, HSIs have virtually no endowment to supplement revenue (Mulnix, Bowden, & Lopez, 2002) because the focus of HSIs has been on access for Hispanic students (Drezner & Villarreal, 2015) as well as retention.

Of the higher education institutions developed specifically to serve Hispanic students, only two remain today: Hostos Community College of the City University of New York and Boricua College, both in Bronx, New York. In 2015, the National Hispanic University in California closed its doors; one of the reasons cited for its being shuttered was government reduction in financial aid (Rodriguez, 2014). Further, studies of presidents, chancellors, and CEOs of HSIs have identified financial resources as the greatest challenge facing their institutions through the years (de los Santos & de los Santos, 2003; de los Santos & Cuamea, 2010). And, although many HSIs are struggling as a result of inadequate resources, there are more than 333 institutions that are categorized as emerging HSIs because their demographic has shifted to between 15 and 24% undergraduate full-time Hispanic enrollment (“Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions,” 2018). Some of these institutions are predominantly white institutions (PWIs) that are evolving into HSIs (Drezner & Villarreal, 2015).
The current higher education landscape of rising costs, evolving technologies, and global competitiveness makes additional funding vital to HSIs’ sustainability. If voluntary support is deemed important to the sustainability of HSIs, understanding foundations’ motivations for giving is equally important. Accordingly, the purposes of this study include the following: to unpack the reasons why contemporary private foundations give to HSIs, to understand how the HSI identity and the HSI institutional advancement office influence giving, and to identify the characteristics of HSIs that influence giving.

Findings from this study will contribute to the body of literature that is focused on the motivation of private foundation giving to HSIs. Findings have the potential to provide insights and inform strategies that HSIs’ advancement offices can employ to become more sophisticated consumers related to voluntary giving. Further, foundations will benefit from this study, as it will lead to a clearer understanding of their motivations for giving in general and, more specifically, to HSIs.

**Research Questions**

This qualitative study is guided by the following questions.

1. What factors motivate the decisions made by private foundations to support HSIs?
2. How does the HSI identity influence private foundation giving to HSIs?
3. What are the characteristics of these institutions that shape funding decisions?
4. What is the role of institutional advancement offices in private foundation giving to HSIs?
CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the first bequest of funds to the colonies for the forming of colonial colleges, philanthropy has played a key role in American higher education (Thelin, 2011). Many scholars state that philanthropy is the vehicle that built the intellectual infrastructure of America's colleges and has been the sole force behind America's modern university (Drezner, 2006; McClure, Frierson, Hall, & Ostlund, 2017; Strickland, 2007). Early giving by philanthropists in support of the colonial colleges varied, as gifts ranged from books to buildings (Curti & Nash, 1965; Drezner, 2011; Strickland, 2007). As America became a nation and its economy grew, those who earned their fortunes from the business sector took an interest in the under-resourced higher education sector, resulting in a notable shift to a more secular focus on science and technical education (Wren, 1983). More than 80% of gifts of $50,000 in the 19th century were given by people whose wealth came from business activities (Wren, 1983). Attention by business leaders to higher education made business philanthropy a distinct feature of higher education in the United States (Wren, 1983). This continues to be the case, though frameworks for philanthropic giving and educational models have undergone extraordinary transformation and continue to change.

In the early 20th century, with monopoly capital, industrialization, and the emergence of unprecedented concentrations of wealth in private hands, a new framework for philanthropy evolved. Philanthropy became privatized through the creation of foundations. One foundation analyst explains foundations as “nongovernmental nonprofit
institutions with their own corpus of financial assets privately held and managed by trustees or directors for the pursuit of some public purpose” (Bernstein, 2014, p. xv). Moreover, the last century has witnessed foundations becoming profoundly entwined with efforts to address significant issues in higher education, such as the education of women and the African American community. According to the Council for Aid to Higher Education (2018), foundations provide approximately 30% of the total voluntary support to higher education, outstripping individual gifts by about 10% in 2012 and 4% in 2017. Despite the obvious significance of foundations’ giving to higher education, the contemporary scholarship is minimal examining the reasons why these organizations give to colleges, universities, and organizations focused on research, scholarship, and the development of educational policy (Frumkin, 2008; Liu, 2006). Instead, the research with regard to philanthropic giving to higher education has focused on individual giving trends and characteristics rather than on the motivations of organizational donors (Drezner, 2011; Drezner & Huehls, 2015). The prevailing research emphasis probably follows from the fact that individual gifts account for 75% of charitable donations (List, 2011).

Motivations for Giving

Overall, the body of literature regarding individual giving is as complex as the reasons that individuals themselves give for their philanthropic efforts. Altruism, defined as an “unselfish regard/concern for the welfare of others” (Merriam-Webster; Dictionary.com; The Free Dictionary) is usually the first and most-discussed reason why people give. As a result, the literature is expansive on the concept of altruism and its predictive power (Andreoni, 1990; Cascione, 2003; Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). Theorists
across disciplines, including evolutionary biologists and sociobiologists, have devoted much time to understanding how this prosocial behavior originated and whether individuals are naturally inclined toward philanthropic acts (Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). One often-cited study suggests that pure altruism does not exist, positing instead a theory of impure altruism, according to which the individual is motivated by internal satisfaction (Andreoni, 1990). In fact, Andreoni (1990) suggests that pure altruism is not generalizable: rather, impure altruism tends to better explain the phenomenon of predictive power giving. Albeit there is much research on altruism, economists overall believe that the public-good model espoused in theories of altruism does not have a zero-sum game, meaning that people give to receive something in return; giving can offset a personal and intrinsic need (Drezner, 2011). Researchers from eight universities came together to study the emotional benefit of prosocial giving across 136 countries (Aknin, Barrington-Leigh, Helliwell, Biswas-Diener, et al., 2013). Findings from the study suggest a universal relationship between giving and happiness. Participants, regardless of their own personal wealth, were happier when they used financial resources to help others. The researchers suggest that the “reward experienced from helping others may be deeply ingrained in human nature” (Aknin, et al., 2013, p. 635).

Although altruism might explain some behavior, the reasons that people give are more complex. Scholars also have attempted to explain individual giving as motivated by economic conditions as well as the desire for tax advantages. Charitable giving has been found to be positively associated with the current economic climate (Drezner, 2006; Leslie & Ramney, 1988). Patterns indicate that even as individual giving responds to the
economic climate, givers are more sensitive to economic upturns in comparison to
economic downturns (List, 2011). As a result, individuals tend to give more when the
economy is strong, and they have surplus funds. Therefore, it is not surprising that when
the stock market struggles, larger individual gifts decline (Seltzer, 2017). In addition, tax
deductibility has been found to have a statistically significant relationship to giving (Liu,
2006; Steuerle, 1987, p. 31) based on research related to changes in the tax laws during
the 1980s. These changes radically altered the giving landscape, and contributions were
observed to substantially increase based on their tax deductibility (Durney, 1991). Tax
benefits are believed to provide the greatest appeal to giving across activities (Dawson,
1988). However, countervailing studies suggest that the relationship to tax benefits is
weak (Taussig, 1967; Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). Scholars Thelin and Trollinger (2014)
believe giving is more connected to the theory of intrinsic motivation, which results in
behavior that satisfies the individual and leads to a more purposeful life. Donors want to
make a change in their lifetime and leave a lasting legacy (Burkhardt, 2007; Strickland,
2007). Renowned developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erickson (1958,
1963), in his lifespan theory of psychosocial development, suggests that people
experience a desire to contribute to, or nurture, positive change that will last beyond their
lifespan. Their generativity is expressed through giving of their time, talents, and
resources. According to Erickson, those who fail to find ways to express their
generativity often feel stagnant and unfulfilled.

Undoubtedly, American higher education has been significantly shaped by lasting
bequests to many institutions past and present. Research indicates that “the self-
satisfaction received from the act of giving and/or the feeling of a moral obligation to contribute to a charitable cause” also contributes to philanthropic activities (Echazu & Nocetti, 2015, p. 52). Other research, regarding the determinants for giving to higher education specifically, has found that outward-facing influences such as prestige and recognition by others also influence reasons for giving (Echazu & Nocetti, 2015). Analyses from various data resources—such as the Voluntary Support to Education (VSE) survey, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS), and data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis—support such findings (Liu, 2006). Institutions rated in the top quartiles of college rankings were the recipients of more private giving (McClure, et al., 2017). According to McClure, et al. (2017), this finding supports Arno’s (1980) critique that foundations are serving the wealthy. These findings appear, moreover, to suggest that there is a strong correlation between prestige and the top well-funded institutions of higher education.

More recently, an evolving body of research suggests that donors give as a result of donor identity (Drezner, 2018). According to Drezner (2018), scholars have provided three explanations for the impact of identity on giving: people’s shared sense of a collective identity; the interdependence of prosocial behavior; and the sympathy that people feel to those closer to them in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. To examine the role of social identity on giving, Drezner (2018) developed a framework called philanthropic mirroring. It suggests that greater emphasis is placed on giving when alumni are able to mirror themselves in the solicitations. His research contributes to the
growing body of scholarship on the complexity and interconnectedness of individual giving.

**Motivations for Giving to Early Minority Institutions**

Literature also exists regarding the motivations for giving by philanthropic organizations to early-minority-serving institutions in the United States, such as the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Anderson, 1988; Gasman, 2007; Gasman & Drezner, 2008). HBCUs were created specifically to support African Americans. In 1868, the Freedman’s Bureau was legislated to integrate the freed slaves into society and to provide rudimentary education for blacks (Watkins, 2001). Missionaries and the corporate philanthropists of the time also began to prioritize educating blacks. According to Watkins (2001), the missionaries were eager to participate in the education of blacks and were “fervent believers in education as a tool for racial advancement” (p. 15). For the missionaries, racial advancement meant eliminating the nation of the “menace” of an uneducated African American population (Gasman, 2007). Education would instead prepare blacks for their subordinate role in the new social structure of the emerging South (Anderson, 1988).

Corporate philanthropists shared a similar ethos regarding the education of blacks with their missionary counterparts. However, their motives would extend beyond the indoctrination of freed blacks to a social ideology that promoted racial inequality. Corporate philanthropists had a more self-serving agenda. Their unprecedented wealth meant that they were accountable only to themselves and could promote their political objectives associated with the education of blacks (Watkins, 2001). Corporate
philanthropists wanted to control the education of blacks by controlling the curriculum (Gasman, 2007). They favored a curriculum that would yield graduates with skills that would contribute to their enterprises (Gasman, 2007). Education was not about building equality or sharing power; it was about a “larger philanthropic objective of social engineering whereby neither unbridled capitalism nor racial subservience would be fundamentally altered” (Watkins, 2001, p. 111). Later, these philanthropists would realize that industrial education and a liberal arts education could coexist; thus, they expanded their giving, which would keep black institutions afloat until the 1930s (Gasman, 2007).

Today, black education is perceived to be one of the most important social issues of the time for industrial philanthropists (Watkins, 2001). Watkins (2001) refers to 20th-century philanthropy as the white architects of black education. The industrial philanthropists undoubtedly wielded economic and political strategies in attempts to impose their social and educational ideologies on the HBCUs (Anderson, 1988). Although the support of these philanthropists might appear altruistic, historians such as Gasman (2012), Anderson (1988), and Watkins (2001) have been able to demonstrate that philanthropists such as Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Rosenwald supported an agenda that did not advance the social mobility of blacks and the poor. Despite their motivations for giving, it is believed that, “in broad terms, Black education has been at the heart of shaping modern America” (Watkins, 2001, p. 181).

**Foundations and Higher Education: An Overview**

Both those within and outside the academy recognize the historical and existing role of foundations in higher education in general. Unquestionably, foundations play a
large role in supporting and educating America’s citizenry, particularly those in higher education. Today, there are four types of foundations: independent, encompassing most of the larger foundations; operating, designating those foundations that primarily run their own programs; corporate, referring to those foundations established by businesses; and community, sustained by funds raised from the public (“Key Facts,” 2014).

According to the most recent edition of the Foundation Center’s *Key Facts on U.S. Foundations* (2014), there were 86,192 foundations in the United States and their total giving amounted to more than $52 billion or roughly 8% of their more than $715 billion in assets (“Key Facts,” 2014). The top five areas of focus for foundation philanthropy in 2014 were Health, Education, Human Services, Public Affairs/Society Benefit, and Arts and Culture (“Key Facts,” 2014). Health and education equally accounted for 44% of the total giving, and the priority areas ranged from ensuring safe drinking water for communities around the globe to reforming public education (“Key Facts” 2014).

Another watchdog, the Council for Aid to Education (2018), further distilled the data on philanthropic giving to higher education, reporting that it increased by 6.3% in 2017.

**Private Foundations (Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller) and Higher Education**

The rise of modern foundations began in the 20th century with the emergence of private foundations by the mega-rich such as Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford.

Recognizing that earlier, more personal forms of giving were not sustainable with such large fortunes, foundations evolved as an institutional response from arbitrary to more targeted giving (Curti & Nash, 1965; Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). General definitions of foundations are that they “are the formal, legal structures that allow an individual or
group to gather resources and then carry out deliberate policies and programs” (Thelin & Trollinger, 2014, p. 67) and that they represent “voluntary action for the public good,” as defined by scholar Robert Payton (as cited in Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). According to Hewa (1998), Carnegie and Rockefeller represented the moral vision and social conscience of their time.

The Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford foundations would show a marked interest in higher education and science. As the American government of the period evinced little interest in the academy, foundations' interest in higher education would go unchecked, allowing them to implement new ideas without limits or compliance (Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). Their deep pockets provided the resources to effect change in the academy (Curti & Nash, 1965). These foundations assisted colleges in achieving goals related to new facilities and research in the 20th century (McClure, et al., 2017), and not by default, developing people who would further their business interests, particularly through the sciences (Brustmann, 2012; Wren, 1983). According to Arnove and Pinede (2007), these foundations were known as the “big three” because they were the most influential and controversial, at the same time as they were “the most forward looking and reform minded” (p. 391).

The agendas of the 20th-century philanthropists who created the foundations would be carried out by a foundation executive, whom Curti and Nash (1965) refer to as the "philanthropoid." These executives promoted the agendas of the philanthropists regarding social challenges. In higher education, their giving evolved from providing unrestricted gifts to providing gifts that would address specific reform in the areas of
science, public policy, race, and social class (Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). The philanthropoid had significant influence on the agenda of the foundation. For Carnegie, the mission of his foundation was to promote knowledge and understanding (Bernstein, 2014). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) under philanthropoid Henry Pritchett brought about higher education standards that exposed the deficits in America’s medical colleges and abuses in college sports (Curti & Nash, 1965; Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). Through its work, the Carnegie Foundation became the precursor to today's accrediting agencies (Bernstein, 2014). Whereas some scholars believe that at least some Carnegie initiatives led to significant positive changes in the higher education landscape (Bernstein, 2014), others question whether the Carnegie Foundation and others succeeded in bringing about the type of higher education reform at the heart of their respective agendas (Thelin & Trollinger, 2014).

Although all foundations were in part created for tax purposes, the Ford Foundation is clearly documented to have been initiated by the family as a means to avoid payment of estate taxes implemented by the Roosevelt administration (Arnove & Pinede, 2007; Curti & Nash, 1965; Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). In an attempt to keep the family fortune under the radar, the Ford Foundation would commit to large-scale higher education investment and, with the death of the family patriarch, would become one of the richest foundations. As led by Clarence Faust, the Ford Foundation placed emphasis on education as a tool to address societal problems and would only invest in those higher education programs that were the most innovative (Curti & Nash, 1965), such as the fifth-year teacher-training initiative. The foundation would court controversy as a result of its
push towards innovation in education—for example, by supporting new teaching methods (Curti & Nash, 1965; Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). Later, the Ford Foundation would be slapped on the hand by Congress in 1969 when it was accused of providing grants to the staff of a Democratic senator (Troyer, 2000). Congress interpreted this as an abuse of the law and in 1969 removed tax incentives for foundations, requiring them to pay a 4% tax and thereby sending foundations a clear warning not to interfere with public policy (Katz, 2012; Troyer, 2000).

Although the Tax Reform Act of 1969 was meant to limit the policy influence of foundations on higher education, Congress since that time has never challenged the role of foundations. Today, significant tax benefits continue to be conferred upon givers, which include (but are not limited to) the following: immediate tax deductions, avoidance of capital gains tax on contributions, faster accumulation of charitable wealth, and complete avoidance of all estate transfer tax (Silk & Lintott, 2002). Today, foundations are held to a 5% tax rule, meaning that each year foundations by law are legally required to spend 5% of their corpus (endowment) on grants and other charitable activities (Casey, 2016). This tax code was designed to allow for foundations to grow their assets and “maintain their purchasing power (giving ability) in perpetuity” (Casey, 2016, para 3), but it also predisposes that the richer the foundation, the larger the grants they can provide (Katz, 2012) and the greater their influence.
Foundations of the 21st Century: Frameworks for Understanding Motivations for Philanthropic Giving by Today’s Foundations

It appears that the United States has hit another era of exponentially increased wealth for a few individuals and families through the advent of new technologies, similar to the wealth enhancement of the industrial philanthropists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Strickland, 2007). As in the 20th century, the greatest wealth is concentrated in five mega-foundations that account for 11% of foundation assets (Adloff, 2014). However, smaller private foundations are growing. These smaller private foundations are the most numerous of the philanthropic organizations. In fact, in the past 15 years, 60% of all private foundations were formed, with the majority having assets less than $10 million (McGlaugon, 2014). Further, data indicate that the small private foundations are changing. The average age of these funders is younger than a decade, indicating that philanthropists are putting their wealth to use as they continue to work and contribute to their foundation (McGlaugon, 2014). Many of these private foundations are characterized by little or no staff. They can be sources of stable, significant, and unrestricted moneys for institutions, with the Bass family’s longstanding support of Yale University as one well-known example (Bernstein, 2014).

The Mega-Foundations

Some scholars believe that “large sums of money dedicated to the common good possess a charisma, making them [foundations] rather immune to criticism and causing them to be perceived positively” (Adloff, 2014, p. x). However, the literature abounds with criticism about the role of today's foundations in higher education (Gose, 2013;
Katz, 2012; Kumashiro, 2012; Lederman, 2012; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). These scholars suggest that mega-foundations in particular are exerting influence without the "bench strength" (meaning staff with higher education experience) but with significant financial resources (Gose, 2013; Kumashiro, 2012). This poses a conundrum for those in higher education, as Arnove argues that foundations contribute to the "production of culture and the formation of public policy" (as cited in Drezner, 2011, p. 82). There is concern about what is perceived as "grantmakers hav[ing] become more intentional in their strategies, more attentive to politics, more focused on metrics of success, and more aggressive about changing policy” (Hess, Henig, & Hatfield, 2016, para. 6). Scholars Dodgson and Gann (2018) warn about philanthropy’s hidden agenda while others advocate that philanthropy’s new agenda is creating value for higher education.

There is seemingly no formal definition of the term *mega-foundation* in the literature; the term appears to be more of a designation based on a foundation’s total assets. Foundations that are referred to in the literature as mega-foundations are often those whose assets are in the billions. Many are private foundations, which is defined by the Council on Foundations (2019) as

> a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization with funds (usually from a single source, such as an individual, family or corporation) and program managed by its own trustees or directors, established to maintain or aid social, educational, religious, or other charitable activities serving the common welfare, primarily through grant-making. U.S. private foundations are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and are classified by the IRS as a private foundation as defined in the code.

20
Probably the most influential foundation is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It
directly and openly engages in practices that influence national educational policy,
behaving as if it is entitled to do so (Katz, 2012). According to Diane Ravitch,
educational historian and former assistant secretary of education under President George
H. W. Bush, it is unprecedented for one foundation to have supported all of the large
think tanks and advocacy groups (Drezner, 2011). The giving patterns of the Gates
Foundation are also emulated by other newer foundations, focusing on intermediaries
rather than on programs at higher education institutions. For example, an internet search
of the Kresge Foundation website during the past three years indicates that giving to
higher education has mostly been directed to intermediary organizations such as
Complete College America, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and
Institute for Higher Education Policy. Funding intermediary organizations, the Gates
Foundation reflects some important trends in 21st-century philanthropy, including an
emphasis on advocacy work to influence policy and collaboration with foundations
sharing similar values to maximize impact (Gose, 2013).

When foundations such as the Gates Foundation provide direct funding to
institutions of higher education, they expect to see dramatic outcomes such as those
experienced at Georgia State University (GSU). GSU, a public, minority-serving
institution, received funds from the Gates Foundation to implement ‘big data’
infrastructure. Subsequently, GSU saw 2,000 more graduates per year, a 30% increase in
degrees earned, 22% increase in the Hispanic population, a 226% rise in the number of
Hispanics in STEM, a 15% increase in black male enrollment, and a 111% increase in the
number of African American men graduating with STEM degrees (Dimeo, 2017). GSU is now a model for the use of big data. These amazing results at GSU were at one time featured on the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation website, suggesting that these are the types of outcomes that the foundation would want to promote.

Critics from both inside and outside the academy are decrying foundations’ attempts to exert excessive control over institutions, particularly the curricula. The 1970s saw small foundations that sought to engage in ‘culture wars’ in the American academy. These smaller, ideologically conservative foundations felt empowered by a memorandum from future Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Education Committee. In his memorandum, Powell indicated the need for more balanced faculty that would support conservative causes (Bernstein, 2014; Kumashiro, 2012). Younger and larger foundations would support these conservative causes, such as the Walton Family Foundation and the Richard and Henry Devos Foundations. Today, the foundations of the Koch family (Charles Koch Foundation and the Fred C. and Mary R. Koch Foundation) have made headlines because they have sought to control curricula and obtain students’ personal information (Levinthal, 2015; McCluskey, 2017).

The Koch foundations are widely seen as attempting to directly influence curricula in a more conservative direction. The foundations have come under investigation for funding networks in higher education promoting the election of conservative political candidates and deregulatory government policies (Levinthal, 2015). Additionally, the Koch brothers have allocated significant funds to research centers focusing on individual liberties and free-market economies. Less public is the Koch
brothers’ funneling of money through a public university’s foundation (campus-related nonprofit foundations), which asserts “private” status (McCluskey, 2017). Today, some institutions are wary of accepting Koch brothers’ donations more for fear of the public outcry than the Koch brothers’ political leanings, as was evidenced by a Brooklyn College, City University of New York, professor’s attempt to get funding from the Koch brothers and the silence from the administration that ensued (Flaherty, 2014). Institutions must wrestle with how much influence they should allow a foundation and, more important, when to say no (Drezner, 2011), despite knowing that such funding can contribute to the greater good.

What is most problematic to policy analysts regarding today’s foundations is their engagement in ‘new’ strategies to exert control over institutions’ policies and practices through various business strategies such as venture and strategic philanthropy. Venture philanthropy is a measurement of the return on investment by the foundation (Bernstein, 2014). In fact, it is reminiscent of the foundations of the industrial philanthropists, where (Curti & Nash, 1965) the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations’ philanthropoid funded specific innovations in education (Curti & Nash, 1965). Examples of venture philanthropists today are the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation. They have “depart[ed] radically from the age of ‘scientific’ industrial philanthropy” or “traditional philanthropies” exemplified by Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller (Saltman, 2009, p. 53). Diane Ravitch concurs with Saltman that venture philanthropists are not to be compared with the earlier era of industrial capitalists, as their aggressive push for school privatization ultimately leads to
the “subvert[ing] of the democratic process” (Ravitch, 2011, para. 10). The negative press regarding the term *venture philanthropy* has led to foundations coining the term *strategic philanthropy*, which appears to be a reimagining of venture philanthropy. Strategic philanthropy means that donations are targeted and there is a short window of time to achieve outcomes (Katz, 2012). Writing about so-called strategic philanthropy of the present era, Gose (2013) notes that the 1960s and 1970s are often looked back upon wistfully by scholars, who consider it the “golden era” of higher education philanthropy.

The 20th-century foundations created the framework for today’s 21st-century philanthropic giving to higher education. The way the private foundations of the 21st century approach giving appears to mark a departure from the past. Some scholars have suggested that these 21st-century foundations are in some ways fundamentally different from earlier foundations (Gose, 2013; Hess, Henig, & Hatfield, 2016; Katz, 2012; Lederman, 2012), even as other scholars assert that the newer foundations act in all major respects like foundations of old (Gasman, 2012). This debate about foundations’ behavior during the 21st century is ongoing among scholars, some of whom believe that the ways in which today’s foundations behave are preventing good ideas from being discovered (Gose, 2013); others, for their part, believe that philanthropy has given rise to ideas that otherwise might not have been realized (Hess, Henig, & Hatfield, 2016). Regardless of the narratives associated with philanthropy, Gasman (2012) believes that, for the greater good, those in education must work with philanthropists.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Context

Although philanthropy has invested billions of dollars in higher education, the factors that motivate foundations to give to Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) in particular have not been truly explored in literature at a rate similar to that of the reasons why individuals give. My study focuses on understanding the motivations behind foundations’ decision making to support HSIs. My interviews of foundation program officers centered on the goal of better understanding how these program officers make decisions and how they make sense of their decision-making process when giving to HSIs. This qualitative-research approach was most appropriate for this study, as I attempted to understand individuals and their meaning-making (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) regarding the act of giving by using semi-structured interviews. In qualitative research, multiple sources of data are important for sense-making (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, I looked at foundations’ websites, articles, and newsletters. Overall, data that I read and heard assisted me in interpreting and making sense of my interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Positionality

Positionality in qualitative research is the researcher’s “role and social location/identity in relationship to the context and setting of the research” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 5). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), regardless of the rigor of a qualitative study, not to acknowledge one’s positionality is to undermine the study. Prior
to the start of my study, I explored my positionality through memo writing, which helped me to articulate and self-analyze the biases and strengths that I bring to this research. Almost my entire career in higher education has been spent working at HSIs. Both institutions have been medium-sized; one is private, and one is public. I observed and was often frustrated by the challenges related to funding, which limited the work of these institutions with the populations they served. Having attended two institutions and now a third that were well-funded, I recognize the differences in, and also lack of, experiences that are available to students at some HSIs because of funding.

Though I am not so naive as to believe that philanthropy will solve higher education issues with regard to funding, I do believe that philanthropy can contribute to improving opportunities and access for students, particularly at institutions that serve first-generation, low-income, and minority students.

Study Approach

I did not engage in a grounded-theory study; however, to better understand why private foundations give to HSIs, I used many practices associated with the methodology. These practices included unstructured interviews; specific techniques to categorize data; interest in interaction and process; distinct strategies for data analysis; and the use of other sources of data, such as documents (Morse, 2009).

The practices derived from grounded-theory methodology were valuable for my research, as semi-structured interviews are at the heart of the study. This lens, when used appropriately, attempts to avoid assumptions and provide a neutral view of people in their social context (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). According to Milliken (2010), this exploratory
method is denoted as well-suited for research that has not attracted prior attention, lacks breadth and depth, or could provide promising new points or views. These new points of view will be grounded in the data collected from the participants, who know what is occurring in the field (Liehr & Smith, 1999).

Given the limited scholarship available about foundation giving to HSIs, I applied the practice of continual interplay between the data collected and the data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), data collection and analysis are not two separate phases for a researcher; rather, they are iterative and integral throughout all phases of research design in a qualitative study. These approaches reflect my research process with regard to private foundation giving to HSIs and have helped me explore the following questions: What factors motivate foundations’ decisions to support HSIs? How does the HSI identity influence foundation giving? What are the characteristics of these institutions that shape funding decisions? What is the role of institutional advancement offices in foundation giving to HSIs?

Identifying Foundations

The process of identifying foundations that would fit the criteria for my research proved challenging, as only 10% of foundations have a website and only one in every 100 foundations share their recent grant data online. Further, only one in every 1,000 foundations share knowledge of what they are funding or producing online.
I began my research by conducting internet searches on foundations that are most often in the news to ascertain whether they met the criteria for my study. For each of these foundations, I combed their websites to review their mission and grant focus and strategies. When accessible, I reviewed the grants they made to higher education during the past five years. My research led me to the Foundation Center’s Foundation Stats page. This page allowed me to sort foundations by category, state, and total giving. I used combinations of these categories to help me narrow my search, as the number of potential foundations meeting my criteria could be in the hundreds or thousands. I later learned of the Foundation Center’s professional-level subscription through the University of Pennsylvania library. The professional-level subscription provided access to numerous data points about the foundations, such as percentage of funds allocated to higher education, the foundation staff, and the foundation category. Further, it allowed me to conduct targeted searches looking through the lens of the foundation’s grant-making activity and the lens of the HSIs who were the recipients of foundation grant making. I identified more than 50 foundations that appeared to meet the criteria of being an independent foundation that has given $100,000 or more to an HSI within the past five
years. There were occasions when foundation program officers indicated that they did not give directly to higher education, yet the Foundation Center directory indicated otherwise. This would later be understood through my interviews, as there were participants unaware of the particulars of grants that were made by other areas of their foundation. I also had intended to interview the foundation officers who were the conduit between the private foundation and the HSI in the allocation of funds totaling $100,000 or more. However, it was not always possible to identify the program officer who managed the grant.

**Identifying Participants**

The initial identification of participants for the study occurred through my chair, a prior faculty member, and foundation websites. I researched more than 100 foundations to ascertain whether they met the criteria for my study. Potential participants whose contact information was not found online required investigative-research techniques that included identifying how the foundation’s email extension for staff was configured and reviewing conference participant listings and news briefs. I subsequently reached out to more than 50 participants by email, explaining my study and requesting an interview. My response rate was very low; approximately 75% of the participants contacted did not respond to my request. On average, I made three attempts to contact potential participants. Halfway through my recruitment of participants, I revised my inquiry letter to inform the potential participants that they had the option to be identified or de-identified in the study. This change was as a result of all but one of my participants indicating their preference to be de-identified. Unfortunately, this did not yield an
increase in responses. I also began employing the snowball-sampling technique, which is a means to identify additional participants through the initial participant. Snowball-sampling leverages the social networks of the participants being interviewed (Atkinson & Flint, 2011). As a qualitative tool, it proved to be limited in this study. Further, during the recruitment process, I experienced participants who confirmed they would like to participate in the study but would not respond to numerous requests to commit to a day and time for the interview.

Data Collection

I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews to understand the phenomenon of foundations giving to HSIs. For Creswell and Poth (2018), the interview protocol is a necessary process for recording information in qualitative studies. I developed an interview protocol for the study that was organized around my research questions. The interview protocol was vetted with my chair, my third reader, and a colleague who has experience in survey design.

Semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate means of collecting data for this study, as interviews are a means by which one can make sense of a specific phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Maxwell, 2013). Interviews also allow for more control over the information received, as the interview protocol will have specific questions meant to elicit information related to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2002). The semi-structured interviews also provided a flexibility that allowed me to probe more using the following questions as frameworks: How would you describe how your foundation carries out its mission to support higher education?
Can you describe the decision-making process regarding higher education? Can you share the characteristics of the institutions you fund? How do you work with advancement offices? How does the HSI identity influence your giving? What do you consider a substantial gift?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a dozen program officers from private foundations to understand the process and reasoning behind their funding of HSIs. The interviews were, on average, 40 minutes. Most program officers opted for phone interviews, and a few participated in Zoom interviews. The program officers being interviewed were provided with a short written overview of my study via email when I reached out to request an interview. A brief overview of the importance of the study and my interest in the study was provided at the start of each interview. Interviewees were then asked to provide verbal consent to being interviewed and recorded. One program officer informed me on the day of the interview that she would prefer not to be recorded. I therefore took notes and subsequently vetted my notes with her. Further, all participants were asked if they preferred to be identified or de-identified. Almost all the participants preferred to be de-identified. As a result, I have de-identified all participants in the study. I also employed masking procedures when referencing information that might identity the program officers or their foundations. The data with identifiable information is stored on a password-protected drive only accessible to me.

I initially intended to identify 15 program officers or directors to interview, as program officers, according to Philanthropy New York, are responsible for the creation and implementation of a grant-making portfolio that aligns with the organization’s
mission (“Philanthropy New York,” n.d.). The number 15 was to account for potential drop-off of three to meet my minimum interview goal of 12 program officers or directors. Twelve was identified as the minimum number of interviews, as some researchers have indicated that 12 is the data-saturation point (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Saturation is considered the gold standard of qualitative research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Prior to embarking on this research, I conducted a pilot study to accomplish the following: test the interview protocol to determine if it would capture the data needed to address my research questions, work through the clarity of the questions, and work out issues related to the sequencing of the questions. I conducted two interviews, one in person and one via Skype, to determine the efficacy of each and to help me assess my interview skills in both mediums—in person and online. After conducting my interviews and having them transcribed, I recognized that both the in-person and online interviews were equally rich with information. The interview process also helped me to refine my protocol further and think about the order of the questions. The data collected from the pilot also would inform my research, given the participant drop-off.

Data Analysis

During the data-collection process, I engaged in some practices that noted grounded-theory researchers identified as ones that would help me “control [the] research process and increase the analytic power” of my work (Charmaz, 2014, p. 7). These practices according to Charmaz (2014) included:
Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis;
Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses;
Using the constant-comparison method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis;
Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis;
and
Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps. (p. 7)

Although I had a framework of questions to explore related to my research questions, I used the semi-structured interview format, as mentioned. Some of the strengths of semi-structured interviews are that they allow for probing and clarification, broad comparisons across interviews, and exploration of new topics as they occur (Wilson, 2013). All the benefits of the semi-structured interviews were realized as I reviewed my interview notes, reflected on what I heard, listened to the recorded interviews, and read the transcripts. Early in the interview process, I began to note themes across interviews. This allowed me to be more expeditious and succinct in precoding the interviews. Thus, I was simultaneously involved in data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014, p. 7).

This led me to engage in precoding my early interviews. According to Ravitch and Carl (2017), precoding could help me accomplish the following: become familiar with the data, identify potential codes, and determine whether aspects of my design needed revising, as well as what additional literature I might need to consult.

I coded my data by using the grounded-theory techniques of open, axial coding and selective techniques. Open coding is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as the
naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data (p. 62). Strauss and Corbin (1990) believe that analysis and communication of the phenomena could not take place without this step. Using the open-coding technique, I was able to identify particular phenomena in the data and group concepts around them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the literature, there are various ways of engaging with open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I chose to code by sentence and paragraph because doing so answered the question of what the participant was conveying.

Axial coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), puts data back together after one has fractured the data through open coding, which is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as “making connections between a category and its subcategories” (p. 97). The “purposes of axial coding are to sort, synthesize, and organize large amounts of data and reassemble them in new ways after open coding” (Cresswell, 1998, as cited in Charmaz, 2014, p. 147). Selective coding is a means of integrating the categories and subcategories for substantive theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The creation of subcategories is referred to as the paradigm model, which is a means of systematically thinking about data and relating the data in complex ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 99). I identified categories and subcategories in my data. Engaging in both open and axial coding required the used of the constant-comparison method as I coded. These methods assisted me in identifying common themes and categories. Both open and axial coding required constant-comparison technique, thereby allowing me to construct “analytic codes and categories from data and not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 6).
I also engaged in memo writing to capture thoughts about the interviews and where I saw connections to other participants. This was particularly useful as I began to hear the same themes across interviews; it was a means of helping me unpack what I was hearing. The memo writing allowed me to see connections early during the interview process. As a result, I was able to reframe my questions and probe deeper in later interviews.

After identifying emerging codes through manual coding of several of the interview transcripts, I purchased Nvivo 12 to support my analysis of the data. All interviews were uploaded to Nvivo and coded directly in the software. Nvivo assisted me in conducting open coding, axial, and selective coding.

After pre-coding manually, I read and coded my data in Nvivo. The table below represents my initial open-coding process. Column one represents the name of the open code; column two, the number of codes by participants; and column three, the references to the code.

**Table 2: Nvivo Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF REFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advancement (Sophistication)</td>
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<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Management</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Importance</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Articulated Mission by Foundation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations' HSI and MSI Mission</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations’ HE Mission</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convening of the Minds</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediaries</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons Learned</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Building</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentionality</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once the interviews were coded using open and axial coding, the interplay that occurred allowed for themes to begin emerging. I then entered the third step of coding, selective coding, which allows for the emergence of categories and sub-categories. This process eventually coalesced into my themes and primary finding.

**Trustworthiness**

To improve the study’s overall trustworthiness, I triangulated the data, cross-checking the following three information sources: (1) recorded interviews with the program officers and transcripts of the interviews; (2) my memos from the interviews; and (3) documents, including articles about and websites of the foundations and the institutions. Document analysis is said to be invaluable to triangulation when studying the same phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). Analyzing multiple data sources will contribute to reducing potential bias as data can be corroborated across these information sources (“Research Methodology,” 2016). By engaging in triangulation strategies and using

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>External</th>
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<tr>
<td>Decision-making (Generally)</td>
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<td>MSIs and HSIs</td>
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<td>Internally</td>
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<td>Higher Ed</td>
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<td>Data Capture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding Is Limited</td>
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<td>Institutional Characteristics</td>
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appropriate lenses to interpret the data, I hope to ensure the reliability of my findings to readers.

**Ethical Considerations**

To address ethical issues that may arise from this study such as a foundation not wanting to be identified, I de-identified the individuals and the foundations in the research to maintain anonymity. Furthermore, information that was deemed private by the interviewees is not reported in the study or discussed outside the privacy of the interview. Data was kept secure when not being analyzed: it was not left in open spaces that would be accessible to all.

I completed my CITI training and applied for IRB approval prior to carrying out my research and collection of data through the University of Pennsylvania’s Institutional Research Office. The IRB proposal detailed my methodology and contained information and materials relevant to my study such as my interview protocol and the text for my verbal consent.
CHAPTER 4:
FINDINGS

Context

Research has not kept abreast of the changes in foundation giving patterns in recent decades (Lederman, 2012). Even in the U.S., where vast literature exists about foundations, relatively little is known about why foundations give to colleges and universities (Drezner, 2011; McClure, et al., 2017). Such knowledge is challenging to access, as it is embedded within foundations' operational and decision-making processes, and at best captured in internal documents such as "grey literature" (Srivastava & Oh, 2010, p. 468). In light of the difficulty in accessing knowledge about foundations' decision-making processes directly, it may be useful to approach the topic somewhat obliquely by surveying research concerning donor motivation, giving in general, and patterns of giving by philanthropic organizations today.

This study set out to examine factors that influence and motivate foundations in their decision-making strategies to support HSIs, and how these strategies are shaped by the identity, characteristics, and institutional advancement offices at these institutions of higher learning. I interviewed 12 program officers from foundations that ranged in size from one staff member to more than 25. I conducted research and identified some of my participants through the Foundation Center, a not-for-profit organization providing information on philanthropy, fundraising, and grants. The Foundation Center ranked four of these foundations in the Top 50 for Total Giving and seven in the Top 50 for Total Assets. Located across the country, the foundations in my study have missions that are
globally-, nationally-, or state-focused. This chapter discusses my primary finding and the themes that buttress this finding.

Although, of course, foundations are not individuals, and the work of foundations takes place across complex institutions, my primary finding is that foundations reflect an ethos of care for institutions that serve low-income, first-generation, and minority students—students they care about. In the nursing literature, care is defined by as "a transpersonal process" and "a nurturing way of relating to a valued other toward whom one feels a personal sense of commitment and responsibility" (Dalpezzo, 2009, as cited in Stroehlein, 2016, para. 3). Through multiple forms of engagement, foundations reflect a commitment and responsibility for the students they care about. Thus, the meaning of an ethos of care takes a particular form in a context where great import is placed on equity for these students. Specifically, “to care” for foundations mean to “partner with,” to support “capacity building,” to “network,” to “share resources,” and to “build relationships”—all elements that reflect an unwavering commitment and responsibility to the students they care about and the individuals at the institutions that serve them.

Across the 12 interviews with foundation officers, four subthemes emerged, all related to my overarching finding pertaining to the ethos of care. The first subtheme is that the HSI identity per se is not a determinant in foundation giving to these types of institutions, although foundations are certainly committed to supporting low-income, first-generation, and minority students. Student income and social class at institutions played a larger role in foundation giving than institutional markers directly related to race or ethnicity. Foundation officers disclosed that they are committed to social justice and
equity agendas with a specific class or income focus. This focus is often correlated with students’ minority race and ethnic identity, but foundation officers represented race and ethnicity as more tangential to their central concerns. The second theme is that institutional advancement offices impact foundation giving to a lesser extent than anticipated. Instead, the reputation, accomplishments, and vision of presidents and institutional leaders were represented as potential deciding factors for foundations’ grant-making decisions.

A third subtheme is that networking and collaboration are at the heart of contemporary philanthropy. Many foundations are engaging in “strategy resets,” which is also termed “new foundation trends” by those who write about foundations. Strategy resets are moving foundations in the direction of increased collaboration at multiple levels, resulting in a more highly networked landscape of higher education and philanthropy. The foundations in this study tend to fund institutional network, rather than individual institutions, frequently operating through intermediary organizations. In other words, foundations may support institutional networks through higher education–focused organizations such as Excelencia (a higher education organization that promotes Latino success in higher education) and HACU (the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, which represents institutions committed to Hispanic success in higher education). Moreover, these foundations frequently collaborate with other foundations for greater collective impact. Last, I found that foundations are simultaneously interested in both student success and institutional transformation and fund institutions focused on both. Institutional transformation is in fact intertwined with student success, as increasing
graduation rates and closing the equity gaps for low-income, first-generation, and minority students (students of color) often reflects some form of institutional transformation. In this section, each subtheme will be discussed in turn.

**Limited Role of the HSI Identity in Giving**

Although all of the participating foundations met the study’s criteria of having given $100,000 or more to an HSI within the past five years, this did not in itself mean that these HSI-supporting foundations had written missions related to HSIs in particular or even higher education more generally. When the foundation officers in the study were asked if they had a specific mission regarding HSIs, many indicated that they did not. The HSI identity was observed to be a marker for the types of students that foundations are interested in serving: low-income, first-generation, and students of color. One of the program officers at a state-focused foundation, in a state with a significant Hispanic population and a number of institutions designated HSIs, also indicated that it was not the HSI moniker per se that was relevant. Rather, it was about those populations of students that were the most vulnerable within the state. This program officer described the students that the foundation most “cares” about as follows:

>You know, I definitely know that institutions and organizations think about our students, but I think they think of them as state kids. We *care* about that, at the public institutions, we *care* about [the fact that] they're *kids of color*, they're *low income*, they're *first generation*. But they're not necessarily thinking of Hispanic or Latin or, you know, Asian or Black, it's just like that's who we're talking about.

In other words, the Hispanic identity per se is not the impetus behind giving. The reason for giving resides instead in markers that include larger groups of people for whom
foundations have a specific mission. As a result, foundations were not always attuned specifically to the Hispanic population that institutions enroll.

One program officer described his foundation’s interest as serving the broader category of student of color, not only Hispanic students.

I wouldn’t say it’s a specific mission, but obviously it’s a specific, I wouldn’t say it’s a mission, maybe is just a nomenclature, but I would say it’s an interest in reaching Hispanic students because students of color . . . ’cause obviously that’s one of the . . . [students of color] . . . Hispanic students.

This same program officer described his interest in supporting students of color as a “proxy” or other way of designating low-income students, the foundation’s key focus.

We focus on institutions that are enrolling the students that we are focused on, which are the low income, first gen, and students of color. We identify those institutions that are enrolling and graduating those students. We focus on the percentage of underrepresented students of color that these institutions are enrolling with the percentage of eligible students, as a proxy for low-income students.

Another program officer acknowledged that her foundation essentially targets “the Latino community, by default,” though she also noted that she “do[es]n’t want to say by default”:

I think probably when you asked me to participate my initial reaction was, “Well, by design, we are not targeting the Latino community in our grant making,” but . . . I don’t want to say by default but given our mission and some of the key demographics, that is a population that we may end up being more specific [about].

She further explains that “by default” means that her foundation does not think of institutions’ identity as minority serving; rather, they are thinking about poverty and
inequality, which are “things [that] are typically framed in terms of low-income students or first-generation students.” These are student groups that have intersecting identities.

Foundations also look at a wide array of institutions that are supporting students across these intersection identities. According to one program officer, they are looking at institutions that support minority ethnic groups—such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans—and they look at institutions that can benefit most from their funding. Institutions that support a high percentage of these groups of minority students are identified as Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). One foundation indicated that they do not have a mission devoted MSIs, but they have had a history of supporting such institutions:

We do not have a specific mission specifically for those institutional types. They fall under the realm, so I would say we have a very broad umbrella. While we don't have a stated goal specifically for minority serving institutions, we have had a history of past and current work in which we engage those institutions.

In some ways, foundations appear to be contradicting themselves. Similarly, another program officer described her foundation’s mission:

We do not have an articulated specific strategy around this. We know that hundreds of thousands of students are enrolled in these colleges and it is important that we support different types of institutions. So, we make sure that [speaker pause] or we dedicate our funding [speaker pause] goes to [what] we think are schools that need the most support in funding, to try innovative programs and improve their systems and capacities. So, HSIs, MSIs are definitely a piece of this, but we also work with the community college levels [and] we work with many other public institutions across the country that do not identify as HSI or MSI.

There is a clear indication among most of the program officers interviewed that the HSI identity has a limited impact on foundation giving to HSIs. One program officer agreed
that perhaps the institution itself—rather than its HSI identity—has an impact on grant making. Taken together, some institutions support the populations that foundations care about “by default,” some of which happen to be HSIs.

HSIs are legally defined as institutions that serve at least 25% Hispanic students (“U.S. Department,” 2016), a definition that is widely recognized by policymakers and the higher education community. Despite this straightforward definition, HSIs have not constructed organizational identities (Garcia & Taylor, 2017). In addition, some higher education institutions are interested in the HSI identity as a means of accessing grant funds and having their institutions be more attractive to minority students during this period of declining undergraduates (Smith-Barrow, 2018). It was therefore not surprising that several foundations asked themselves what it meant to be an HSI. One program officer shared:

The challenges [are] which HSIs are really serving Latino students well and are focused on serving Latino students as opposed to [those] categorically eligible for funding because they're HSIs. And, I know that there are groups like Excelencia and others that have been trying to create a definition that would distinguish those institutions.

The challenge, as this program officer sees it, is identifying which HSIs are “Hispanic-enrolling” and which HSIs are truly “Hispanic-serving.” Much has been noted in the literature about Hispanic-enrolling versus Hispanic-serving institutions (Contreras, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008; Gross, 2016; Núñez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2016; Santiago, 2009; Smith-Barrow, 2018). It appears foundations too are still exploring what it means to be an HSI, along with scholars. In other words, both are trying to identify
characteristics beyond the percentage of Latino enrollment that identifies an institution as an HSI.

Another program officer shared similar sentiments regarding his foundation’s trying to unpack what it means to be an HSI and how the HSI identity is aligned with the foundation’s work and its strategy focus. Accordingly, he noted, “we've just only recently started investing more, in more of a strategic way, even with an organization like Excelencia and really, for us, start to really reflect on what it means to be a Hispanic Serving Institution.”

Within these conversations, program officers mentioned that foundations are not the only organizations trying to decipher the difference between Hispanic-enrolling and Hispanic-serving institutions. Organizations such as Excelencia, whose primary focus is closing the equity gap for Latino students, are trying to determine which institutions are Hispanic-serving and what that designation means for instructional curricula, programs, and services. As result, foundations are consulting with Excelencia and other similar organizations to understand how to “provide opportunities for a student the [education] system was not designed to serve.” They are interested in transforming these higher education systems so that they are “more efficient and equitable.”

Social Justice and Equity

Although the HSI identity has a limited role in determining foundation giving, many HSIs are serving the minority students that foundations care most about, described repeatedly by foundation officers as “low-income” and “first generation” students. Six program officers spoke at length, clarifying that they in fact did not have a specific
mission associated with higher education. Instead, their foundations’ broader missions were centered on social justice and equity, concepts that have received significant policy attention and have driven research and discussion in higher education (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Kelly & Lugo, 2017). Even the six foundations that indicated that they did not have a specific mission with regard to higher education shared a common social justice and equity focus, and in some cases, a focus on policy for populations that are historically poor and marginalized. This is not surprising given the urgent focus on the part of policymakers and institutional leaders on African American, Latino, Native American and low-income populations (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017). Three of the foundations described their missions as follows:

Okay, well I would say our foundation doesn’t necessarily have an explicit mission to support higher education. . . . So, the mission of our foundation is to improve the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged people around the world. And, we do that in eleven different strategic areas. So, I mean it hasn’t been explicit, I would say it is something that comes as kind of an add-on to something.

Another officer added:

We have bodies of work that we are trying to really advance, upward mobility in the state and to address issues related to poverty and inequality. And so, we have big bodies of work around kind of career pathways and helping folks get in from low-wage work and into . . . middle-wage work. We have bodies of work around protecting workers’ rights, so they’re not being exploited.

A third foundation official echoed similar sentiments:

Well, the overall foundation’s mission is to promote opportunity for low-income people in American cities and we see our work as promoting . . . post-secondary attainment, sort of underneath that.
For these foundations, particularly those with substantial assets, higher education is too narrow a focus in comparison to the wider goals of social justice and equity. Yet, higher education is undoubtedly aligned with and connected to the broader social justice mission, given that “higher education falls under the provider umbrella and institutions are a part of that,” as one foundation officer noted. One foundation that ranks within the top 10 largest foundations by total giving in the U.S. espouses a mission grounded in the belief that “all lives have value,” which is reflected in its global focus and national work. The foundation is committed to “providing opportunities to those to eventually lift themselves out of poverty and providing a system that provides more social and economic mobility.” Accordingly, this foundation’s focus on higher education is “not only just increasing their [low-income, first-generation, and students-of-color] graduation rate, but also closing the equity gap amongst that group.” As another foundation officer stated, “You can't benefit from the American dream in the 21st century if, frankly, if you can't get a college degree. It's not impossible, but the evidence suggests that it's highly unlikely.” And, according to the 2015 National Center for Education Statistics, “only 14% of lower-socioeconomic-status students attained a bachelor’s or higher degree within eight years of graduating from high school, compared to 29% of middle-income students” (“Addressing the College Completion,” 2017, para. 2). This attainment gap in many ways explains foundations’ keen interest in improving graduation rates in higher education for low-income, first-generation, and minority students. The opportunity for these groups to get a degree is a means of addressing “poverty and inequality” and
providing opportunities for “upward mobility.” In sum, foundations are expressing their equity agenda through helping institutions close the attainment gap.

Several foundations are interested in moving graduation rates and supporting higher education initiatives that will impact policy related to social justice and equity. One foundation in the top 25 by total giving in the U.S. supports a program for doctoral students, many of whom have “lived experiences” in impoverished communities. The junior scholars they fund are encouraged to conduct research that “underlies policies” that impact the health of individuals from their own communities. In funding these doctoral students, the foundation sees itself as creating leadership to improve public health, and particularly health in the most marginalized communities, thereby advancing a social justice and equity mission. All the foundation officers emphasized that their higher education concerns pertained to closing the achievement gap for the “most underserved students,” students they care about.

Research using Foundation Center resources indicated that education philanthropy for the foundations interviewed ranks as either the first, second, or third priority of total funds allocated. As shown in Table 3, funding for higher education was the first priority of eight of the 12 foundations included in this study. This is not surprising, as data from the Foundation Center indicates that since the 1960s, health-related causes or organizations and education have accounted for about 50% of foundations’ grant making (McGill, 2018). This suggests that higher education is a more significant vehicle for these social-justice and equity-focused foundations than they themselves might attest.
Foundation giving to higher education appears, therefore, to be a means to an end: a means of achieving the social justice mission of “closing the equity gap” and promoting “social mobility.” This is even the case for a foundation that disavows an overt equity agenda:

We don't necessarily have an equity agenda as part of our mission. And so, as a staff, it's an interesting tension where you're trying to lift up an angle that doesn't necessarily have imprint in your mission, but they're aligned.

Overall, the foundations’ mission with regard to HSIs focuses on serving low-income, first-generation, and minority students. As one foundation states, “For us, it's all about the students, and the institutions that are supporting those students.” This is a theme that has carried across almost all of the foundations. Foundations are supporting institutions because they are serving underrepresented groups that foundations “care

### Table 3: Foundation Funding Priorities

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<th>FOUNDATION</th>
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about,” and these institutions allow them to carry out their social-justice and equity agenda.

**Role of Institutional Advancement in Foundation Giving Overshadowed by Institutional Leadership**

Similarly, the role of institutional advancement does not play a significant role in foundation giving to HSIs. It is often assumed that advancement or development offices provide the pathway for philanthropic giving at institutions. At some institutions, they are the gatekeepers to foundations; other members of the institution are not allowed to engage foundations without being vetted by their development office or the institutional advancement office, titles that are used interchangeably within this dissertation. However, my findings suggest that development officers do not necessarily play a significant role in giving to the foundations interviewed for this study. Although some foundations indicated that the development office was very important, they are characterized as conveners rather than significant drivers behind giving decisions. One of the program officers described the role of the advancement officer as follows:

“Advancement officers are important maestros to bring everyone together, program and leadership, sort of our peers.” The word “maestro” connotes one who is responsible for orchestrating the “players.” The work of the “maestros” is explained by another foundation:

> We typically do have contact if there's a development director or head of advancement. . . . Usually, the person we're most likely to talk to is the person in charge of the work, but maybe the advancement person's on the line making sure that the notes are taken, and all the questions are asked about timing and reports are submitted on time after the grant is submitted or after the grant is made.
Though this role is undoubtedly important, the work of the development office appears to be more peripheral.

When working directly with institutions, one program officer indicated that she prefers not to have the middle people involved, a reference to the development officers. Having had significant experience with development officers, this program officer concluded that when working directly with an institution, she prefers to work with the project staff, which allows for closer relationships.

Most often, actually, we have more conversations with project leaders and not necessarily the CFR. Sometimes you have fabulous CFRs that are very well aware of what's happening at the program level, but sometimes they just don't know and they're very, I think, critical for their teams in terms of operations. But what we're most often talking about are the problematic details, and that's even our most resourced institutions, the CFR people are helping at the midway point to connect us to the individuals. But I think frankly in some of our smaller institutions, we enjoy a closer relationship with the project staff because we don't actually have that middle person.

Smaller development offices were described by one participant as more preferable to work with, as the larger universities had an “army” in their development offices that tended to be more bureaucratic. In such bureaucratic offices, it is difficult to build relationships, which all of the foundations viewed as very important, particularly with the person or project staff who are responsible for the grant. Sometimes, clarity related to the role of the development office in the grant-making process is not always present. One of the program directors shared, “My other grants are more like research grants that are maybe $250,000 to $500,000, and so I don't think the advancement office would get
involved, because it's a one-off-type grant.” Development offices appeared to have limited roles when it came to ways in which foundations gave money to institutions.

It was clear from my interviews that institutional leaders, particularly institutional presidents, play a more important part in foundation giving than those in the development offices. One reason is that presidents are the ones most often in town visiting alumni and the foundations at the “Park Avenue, Lexington Avenue addresses that foundations enjoy,” as described by one of my interviewees. Thus, presidents are more likely than those in the development office to make personal connections with foundation leaders and programs. More than presidential visits to foundations, presidential characteristics appear to play an important part in giving. For example, foundations are interested in presidents who exhibit “strong leadership” and “set the vision.” One program director explained what strong leadership looks like at an institution that they would fund:

Openness and the willingness of the institutional leader, the president and etc. to be committed to the work that’s being proposed and done, and conducted . . . the team is all about preparing the next generation of leaders. So, leadership is very important to our foundation. So, we look at the leaders and sort of the investment that leader has made as part of, you know, with his or her institution.

Another program officer indicated that they were always excited to speak with a “well-known president who's got a great reputation for getting things done.” In this sense, foundations often sought out institutional presidents who have the reputation for aligning their work and vision with that of the foundation. The presidential reputation appears to be a powerful motivator for giving. For one foundation, if a president is introduced through a “trusted source,” but the work of that institution is not aligned with their priorities, the program officer will keep in touch with that leader until there is an
opportunity to work together. One program officer summed it up as, “I do think leadership and reputation of leadership matters.”

In addition to probing whether a president is providing effective leadership for an institution, foundations also look closely at the leaders’ commitment to the initiatives that the foundations support on the campus. One program officer shared that a request for proposal (RFP) fell apart when the foundation couldn’t get the institution’s president excited about the project, which ultimately “fizzled” and was given to another institution. The new president’s commitment to the project at the other institution was evident, and the foundation’s support for her was also clear, as the initiative moved on with her when she took the helm at another institution. Thus, the presidents’ commitment to a foundation’s initiative often is a key factor in financial foundation support for the institution.

Institutional provosts, to a lesser extent, also influence foundation giving. As one foundation office indicated, “We usually begin with the president and the provost. We almost always have a meeting an hour alone with the president, [and] we almost always have an hour alone with the provost.” The provost in this study is seen as the leader who manages the effort on the ground. For this reason, foundations tend to view the provost as the leader with whom they can work out more “fine-grained analysis.” According to one foundation officer, “Usually [when] I want to talk to sort of more senior leadership, oftentimes it's the provost.” In comparison with the institutional leadership (president and provost), development offices do not appear to have nearly as significant an impact on whether funders give to HSIs.
Strategy Resets Involving Networking and Collaboration

In higher education, one widely circulated view is that foundations, particularly “mega foundations” like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, have unlimited funding to contribute to their causes and undermine democracy (Barkan, 2013; Strauss, 2014). This “anecdotal belief” is exacerbated by the unprecedented wealth increase in recent decades that has disproportionately benefitted a small number of individuals at the top of the U.S. socioeconomic system (Barkan, 2013). According to Foundation Center statistics, between 2002 and 2014, the total number of foundations in the United States has grown by 33% from 64,843 to 86,726 (“Number of Foundations,” n.d.). Despite this trend, many program officers I interviewed clearly stated that foundations had limited funding, even those whose foundation was in the top 50 in terms of assets. One program officer described how important it is to be thoughtful in allocating funding, given limited funds available:

An organizational culture that really believes in making sure that the dollars that we have [pause] Because we don't have a whole lot in the grand scheme of things, given some of the other foundations in the area, but we want to be strategic about where dollars go and that they go to those that truly can, both need them, and use them in a way to really propel themselves out into the workforce and into their community and make a difference.

Grants are based on available funds, and one foundation’s strategy is to divide money evenly throughout the year owing to limited funding. Some foundations distribute their funds based on an institution’s alignment with the goals and values of the foundation. Some foundations also acknowledged that they are “not a foundation that's set up to support and make long- term investments over and over again.” Rather, their grants must
have a clear end in place. The program officer used the example that they could not support 20 college coaches for 20 years; instead, they would rather “support the development of a curriculum or an evaluation or data-collection process.” This, however, does not mean that the grantee could not apply again for support. This process of supporting short-term projects is determined by the amount of available grant-making funds.

Reference to limited funding was a pervasive theme among the foundation officers I interviewed. However, one foundation representative—an apparent outlier—expressed the belief that “philanthropy is a world of excess. You shouldn’t be looking to save money; you should be looking to spend more.” This singular view reflects the nostalgia in the foundation literature regarding historic behaviors associated with funding higher education. However, a program officer from one of the larger foundations sent a cautionary message: “I just don't think foundations have enough money to replace government.” Several foundation officers similarly emphasized that their organizations’ assets are limited in potential reach and efficacy, particularly when compared to the resources of government funding.

Strategy Reset

The theme of limited funding for an urgent social-justice and equity agenda appears to be driving foundations’ efforts to reset their higher education strategy. A strategy reset indicates a foundation’s approach to the way it allocates funds that differs from how it has allocated funds in the past. Many foundations are strategizing about how they can best extend funding to maximize what they refer to as their limited funding. I
heard from many program officers that they are supporting initiatives that are “scalable and replicable.” According to one foundation’s program officer, “we think a lot around efficiency and staff capacity and scale.” For many of the foundations in my study, efficiency means no longer focusing on individual institutions.

Funding single institutions in the 21st century does not appear to be practical for many of the foundations in the study. For some foundations, tackling one institution at a time does not address their urgency in terms of moving their social-justice and equity agenda. As a result, strategies for allocating funds and identifying priorities are evolving at some foundations every few years (or less) because they recognize that it is difficult to reach their goals “one institution at a time.” According to one program officer, “We are actively sort of shaping our strategy, reshaping strategy, you know, over time. That's pretty standard in foundations, where we do strategy refinements and strategy refreshes and all those kinds of things.” This foundation program officer wittily referred to strategy refinements as “philanthropic jargon [for] changing our minds.” However, resetting foundation strategies involves more than this: A “strategy reset” is a deliberate and reflective process that takes time. One foundation officer indicated that her foundation decided to engage in a year-long moratorium on higher education philanthropy to review its overall strategy. Some foundations include their grantees in this process of deliberation by convening advisory boards of grantees to weigh into the reset process. Such convenings help foundations to reshape their strategy as they gather input from practitioners on the ground and experts in the field.
Understanding the outcomes of their giving and resetting of strategies appears to be intertwined with foundations’ use of publicly available data such as “IPEDs or the [National Student] Clearing House.” Foundations look at such data “to inform practice,” including their decision-making procedures related to giving. For example, if foundations are thinking about closing the gap concerned with attainment, they examine these institutional data to determine institutions’ commitment to improving “Latino students’ success.” As stakeholders encourage higher education institutions to engage in data-informed decision making, foundations too are using data to reflect upon and evaluate their work, including their support for grantees.

Foundations gather quantitative data from national databases, and qualitative data from their grantees based on conversation with leaders in the field. These data allow foundations to “execute [their] work more broadly.” The iterative process of data analysis and consulting with stakeholders on the ground assists in a strategy reset. According to one program officer, her foundation has a “bigger understanding of their work and what they are doing.” Having this “bigger picture” helps foundations to refine their idea of the kinds of projects they would like to support. There is a direct relation between the conversations and convenings involved in a “strategy reset” and the development of new RFPs at some of the foundations in my study.

One foundation officer also expressed the expectation that institutions use data to understand the areas in which they are most successful, as well as areas requiring improvement. This foundation wanted to see data disseminated and used by individuals across institutions—and not only by the subset of individuals whose institutional role is
to analyze data. When there is broad access to the data, the institution understands where it is and how it can improve. Georgia State University and Sam Houston State University were cited as examples of institutions that have closed the equity gap in terms of “Hispanic students versus white students.” This same foundation believes “the data piece actually has been an important tool into grounding an institution around real numbers, around how well it's actually doing; not just how one feels about how one is doing, but what does the data say.” Similarly, foundations are increasingly using data to obtain broader insights into their strategies.

Along with data, foundations examine “lots of metrics” when making decisions about giving to institutions that support the students they care about. Beyond metrics associated with academic quality, foundations want to see indicators of financial stability and commitment to underserved students, including first-generation students and students of color. One foundation was particularly interested in metrics that indicated whether an institution was financially stable and shared how proposals have been delayed because the team could not reach consensus about the financial stability of an organization under consideration for funding. Although the organization “had a good track record,” that indicator alone was not enough to commit to an institution.

This same foundation officer, who requires copious amounts of institutional data “up front” to determine the “health” of the institution, acknowledges that there is a “trend” regarding data that puts institutions under pressure to meet certain metrics. Still, this foundation officer indicated that metrics help institutions refine programs and determine if they are using resources in the smartest way. Data can provide “aha
moments” that can help organizations refine and allocate resources in the smartest way, but this foundation officer cautioned that there is a downside to data: “people getting carried away, hiding behind significant data to not take risks because the info is not there for these ideas.” This foundation recommends a “balance about expectations” when it comes to data. Nevertheless, many foundations are using data as a “qualifier to make some decisions” related to new strategic investments or new strategies to serve the students they care about.

*Intermediaries and Institutional Networks Strategy*

The use of data by foundations, the problem of limited funding, and foundations’ social-justice and equity agendas appear to coalesce in driving strategy resets. Many of the officers I interviewed returned to this theme of resetting strategy as a way to better integrate demands from different stakeholders and better respond to funding exigencies. In resetting strategy, many foundations are departing from the practice of funding individual institutions, which has been prevalent in higher education until recently (and dates back to the colonial era). Instead, foundations are funding what some program officers refer to as “intermediaries.” Program officers characterized intermediaries as non-profit higher-education or community-based organizations such as Excelencia, HACU (a higher education organization), along with New Visions and Good Shepherd (community-based organizations). These networked organizations are described by one participant as entities that “have that intel, that have those relationships, those are the organizations we prioritize working with; or actually, I'll say, our interest is in working with those organizations.”
According to one program officer, these “partnerships are and have been changing the way that foundations work.” Another program officer indicated, “we’ve revised our strategy since then, so . . . now we work with the intermediaries and networks of schools.” In working with networked organizations, foundations strive to touch a greater number of people they “care” about (low-income, first-generation, and minority students), with “fewer transactions.” One participant explains why intermediaries as a strategy makes sense for his organization. Managing myriad relationships for the foundation was difficult, and intermediaries allowed for a better way of capturing learning across institutions:

As a strategy we've . . . and prior to the last few years, I would say . . . I think we've worked with well over a hundred and fifty or so institutions on a one-to-one basis. But as we think about, and that has been sort of a valuable exercise and valuable experience . . . but as we think about scaling, as we think about reaching a broader set of institutions, as we think about capturing lessons from this work, it's less efficient to do it . . . you have a hundred institutions, you have thirty different relationships, forty different relationships with forty different organizations, and you have to do some sense-making across all those organizations to capture lessons and important development. So, the work with the intermediary, I'd say, one, it's around the efficiency piece, in terms of how you capture lessons . . . across a number of institutions. So, an institution and an intermediary can play that capturing function of lessons of an institution.

Another program officer provided an example that crystallized foundations’ motivation for moving away from individual funding and toward intermediaries. This foundation invested in Latino doctoral students at a large HSI in the South, with the goal of helping such students graduate and attain a doctorate. However, the investment was deemed not to be a “smashing success” because it simply “did not make sense,” for there were few Latino students enrolled in the doctoral program. For the program officer, such
low enrollment was not “driving home [the] point” of supporting Hispanic students in getting their doctoral degree. This resulted in the foundation opening up the doctoral-support program across institutions to support students from other racial and ethnic minority backgrounds. This anecdote illustrates the trend away from funding single institutions toward funding networks of institutions instead. For many of the participants in my study, funding individual institutions is increasingly rare, particularly because of their sense of limited funding and the heightened sense of the needs of the students they profess to most “care” about. As one foundation officer observed, if his foundation were to fund an individual institution, it would have to be “extraordinary in some way.” We can assume that “extraordinary” means Georgia State and the University of North Carolina–Greensboro, institutions mentioned by foundations in the study as having closed the equity gap.

The not-for-profit intermediary organizations allow foundations, particularly the larger foundations that tend to work with them, to have greater reach and efficacy than they would otherwise in higher education. National intermediaries, such as Excelencia and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), are connected to many HSIs by the very nature of their mission. One foundation officer describes why they rely on such intermediaries:

Because we're a national foundation, we could potentially, are interested in working with communities across the country. So, we're not limited to just, we only just like schools that are local in this state or this region, so that obviously leaves a large pool of potential partners. So, we do rely on the community-based or the intermediary nonprofit partner to do that work.
Program officers describe how intermediaries are building networks and convening groups of different institutions and sectors across higher education. This capacity by intermediaries to reach a larger spectrum of institutions is undoubtedly a driver for collaboration, as their work can be leveraged for greater impact in terms of the low-income, first-generation, minority students that foundations profess to “care” about. One participant explained the benefits of working with intermediaries and how working with more than one intermediary can influence moving a foundation’s agenda:

The impetus for working together is that you can get more resources out to do the work we want to get done. It also can mean that when [Hawaii University] or somebody needs us to put our name in to advocate for something, we can have a group, which is more powerful than an individual foundation.

Investing in higher education is not only about the money, but it is also about leveraging relationships with like-minded organizations to reach their intended goals. Cultivating relationships with such organizations has not been the behavior of foundations in the recent past. Rather, such leveraged networking via intermediaries is a new strategy since the 1980s (Szanton, 2003) which foundations are engaging in order to solve some of the larger challenges of higher education.

Another trend for greater impact is foundations’ work with networks of institutions that are in line with how foundations perceive their engagement with intermediaries. Like working with intermediaries, working with networks of institutions allows foundations to stretch their dollars. Foundations provide one allocation so institutions can work on a collective problem. One program officer stated her foundation supports its work in higher education by “thinking and working with networks of
institutions or collaborations of institutions . . . to solve a problem that improves systems and processes . . . to better serve students.” Another program officer indicated that his foundation has specifically revised their strategy to work with both intermediaries and networks of schools.

The other thing is a lot of the people would come to us and there'd be individual colleges trying to get us to support their work and we just don't have the money to fund individual colleges on a regular basis. That's why we typically fund networks in groups of institutions.

On the topic of HSIs, this same program officer indicated that their “highest commitment would [be] to networks of HSIs that are demonstrating their commitment to low-income students and that are showing that they have the policies, procedures, and orientation that support low-income, first-generation, Latino students.” This foundation is representative of other foundations that are now working with a network of institutions as part of their strategy reset. All these foundations previously had an emphasis on building relationships with and funding single institutions rather than intermediaries or institutional networks.

Repeatedly, I heard my interviewees attest that they “rarely fund individual institutions.” The consensus appears to be that funding individual institutions is less effective than working with intermediaries and networks. This position appears to be related to a preoccupation with data analysis on a large scale, or “big data.” Foundations are looking for “what is scalable, what is replicable, what can be shared, how can institutions and systems work together.” To this end, there appears to be continual assessment and evaluation of strategies to determine whether current strategies are having
the intended impact on their higher education social-justice and equity agendas. By all indications, foundations’ work with intermediaries and networks of institutions will continue as these intermediaries are a means by which foundations can improve their efficacy and extend the reach of their avowedly limited funding.

Although several of the foundations in the study indicated they still fund individual institutions, there is a clear emphasis among most of the foundations interviewed on developing more collaborative partnerships overall. It may be argued that their investment in intermediaries creates an interesting tension related to foundations’ higher education work, as foundations leverage their engagement with intermediaries for greater impact and become less involved with the institutions and student populations directly.

**Collective Impact Strategy**

In addition to working with intermediaries and institutional networks, foundations are combining forces with each other to leverage their collective funds and have a larger impact with regard to shared missions for the students they “care” about. According to one foundation, “the smaller foundations love working with us. Love it! And I'll say, ‘Look, I know that you can't put $2 million into this project, but $10,000, $20,000, $30,000?’ ” This participant used the phrase “collective impact” to denote collaboration between and across foundations to achieve common goals.

One state-focused foundation indicated that it works a lot with national funders. It has worked hard to maintain these relationships by trying to coordinate, communicate,
and come together to do things, which appears to have resulted in a certain level of respect and trust:

The Gates Foundations can go wherever they want. And go have a conversation with whoever they want to have a conversation with. But, you know, their California Senior Program Officer always touches base with us to sort of understand well, okay, so if we wanted to have a conversation with these folks, this is a new relationship for them, you know, what do we know about them? How do they play with others in this space?

This same foundation acknowledges that this behavior has only been occurring in the past “couple of years” and this trend, while positive, does present “lots of politics.” Despite the politics, one funder indicates that its board believes in working with other organizations, as a result of being able to leverage a collective voice to support institutions when they are in need of advocacy. For smaller foundations, it is a means of better supporting their grantees: “We recognize the modesty of our own grant making and if we can collaborate with other funders to elevate the work of grantees, that's also good. I think we're all better if we can work toward similar ends together.”

This trend of foundations working together appears unlikely to go away. Foundations are using data to inform their strategies about what is working in higher education for the students they care about. They are also sharing data showing what works, especially as it relates to student success and transformation, two attributes that promote foundation giving. Overall, foundations are focused on the populations they serve and strategizing ways to do more with less. Partnership strategies are increasingly attractive to foundations with limited resources to move their equity agenda for the students they care about.
Prioritizing Student Success and Institutional Transformation

The interviews revealed that foundations are broadly interested in institutions that (a) prioritize student success, particularly the success of students of color; (b) have transformed their own retention and graduation practices; or (c) demonstrate an interest in making changes that will improve retention and graduation practices. One of the ways in which foundations gauge an institution’s effectiveness is to evaluate retention and graduation rates. Institutions with high graduation rates are unquestionably favored by foundations because graduation is in itself a relatively clear measure of student success. Two program officers expressed a preference for working with institutions with moderately high graduation rates, graduation rates of at least 65% for one and at least 70% for the other. Nevertheless, both officers recognized that for institutions that predominantly serve low-income and minority students, national four-year graduation rates are significantly below these relatively high thresholds. As one participant stated, although they place a high value on four-year graduation rates, they do consider other factors that may impact these rates:

We don’t mean to be exclusive. I mean, frankly, we have community colleges in our portfolio and we’re well aware that’s just not remotely close to what happens there. But what we’re looking for, and it’s in cases where an institution does not have 65% graduation rate or higher, is an explanation from the applicant about how their proposed plan will help increase graduation rates at their, like how the proposed plan is connected to [a] success rate for students, appreciating the fact that it may not be true at that institution.

Clearly, though this foundation prioritizes success as indicated by high graduation rates, it is also interested in supporting institutions that want to improve their graduation rates.
Beyond looking at graduation data, foundations also try to determine institutions’ commitment to improving graduation rates if rates are well below the desired threshold. As one participant noted, her foundation “do[es] the best [it] can in evaluating institutions’ commitment to these goals and objectives, retention and graduation.” One foundation officer explained that one measure of institutional commitment to student success is whether institutional stakeholders are “in the field” trying to learn from the experiences of similar institutions. Thus, institutions can be evaluated by foundations on the basis of their investment in networking and shared learning. One foundation sets stock on sharing broadly what works: if an institution is doing poorly, he implies, stakeholders should be listening and learning from others that are doing similar work well. The program officer elaborated on this point:

If you're, for example, a community college that hopes to be effective with student success and you're not going to the Achieving the Dream conference, it doesn't mean absolutely that we wouldn't talk to you, but the question is, is if you're so innovative, why aren't you part of the country's biggest reform network for community colleges? And if you're really committed to Latino student success, why wouldn't you go to Excelencia convenings and meetings? It doesn’t mean that you can’t be [effective], but it does raise the question, how connected are you to the field if you’re not going to [develop] the sort of leaders in the field that we hope to support.

Those institutions that have a commitment to moving their retention and graduation rates are the ones that are deemed “transformative.” Transformation, my interviewees concur, means that institutions are shifting their metrics toward closing the equity gap for low-income, first-generation students and students of color, specifically with regard to graduation. Such institutions are especially interesting to foundations if
they have managed to improve retention and graduation rates or other key metrics in innovative ways from which others can learn. Georgia State’s model of transformation was cited by two of the foundation officers I interviewed. Georgia State has increased graduation rates by 6 percent since 2013, closing the gap for low-income, first-generation, and minority students, and increasing graduation rates for these students in STEM (Kamenetz, 2016). The program officers acknowledged that moving graduation metrics is not easy, particularly as other outside pressures mean that the value of higher education is increasingly questioned. Despite such pressures, one program officer expressed optimism about ongoing possibilities for innovative change in higher education.

Folks are really questioning the value of higher ed. And we're seeing, obviously, more and more of our students that we're focusing on attending the institutions that reflect their demographic group, and so I think the opportunity is incredibly ripe for, potentially, really innovative ways of looking at this work.

Another program officer shared this optimism about institutions’ ability to shift key indicators in a positive direction if engaging with the appropriate “education . . . [and] business” models:

[O]ur foundational belief is that, as a strategy, we believe colleges and universities can transform . . . the way they're transforming both their education models as well as their business models to eliminate the attainment gaps and improve credential efficiency.

When institutions transform at the academic and administrative levels, the outcome is student success. Albeit the foundation officers I interviewed believe institutional transformation is achievable, some also recognized it as being a “really long and intensive process that requires a significant commitment at all levels of a campus.”
Institutions that are favored by foundations display characteristics such as “interest in wanting to transform . . . they’re interested in implementing a set of solutions and capacities to actually make those practices better.” Institutions that program officers feel are “committed to a transformation process” are more likely to receive funds, as they are closing the equity gap for the students the foundations care about.

Toward these goals of student success and institutional transformation, foundations have established networks for sharing knowledge and best practices. The process of sharing is another means of scaling up and extending their social-justice and equity agenda for the students they purport to “care” about. On “scaling up” and sharing knowledge, many of my interviewees echoed the sentiments of one program officer, who explained: “We're happy to share what we're learning in terms of how we're approaching this work, and we're interested in how you're approaching your work.” Some foundations support their grantees by assisting them in disseminating their work more broadly in public arenas such as conferences and on their websites so that others “can consider for themselves possibly applying those lessons to their own campus contexts.” Others are working with their intermediaries to support institutions to “transform” through their dissemination of learning across a broader group of grantees.

Toward an Ethos of Care

Given the negative reputation that some private funders have in public higher education, I was surprised and reassured to find that foundation officers repeatedly professed concern for students, which I term their “ethos of care.” I have borrowed my usage of this phrase from the nursing literature. As mentioned earlier, “care” is defined in
the nursing literature as a “nurturing way of relating to a valued other toward whom one feels a personal sense of commitment and responsibility” (Dalpezzo, 2009, as cited in Stroehlein, 2016, para. 3). This definition of care was reflected in many of the foundation officers’ comments, particularly as they spoke about higher education and the student populations that they saw as fitting into their social-justice and equity agendas. Phrases such as the following were used by program officers when talking about low-income, minority, and/or first-generation students: “we care deeply,” “students that we care about,” “[we] care about Latino students,” and “funders care about MSIs.” What I am calling the “ethos of care” was also apparent in the ways foundation officers discussed how they supported institutions that enroll the students they care about. Their support of institutions, particularly through the grant-writing process, evidenced a certain level of commitment and responsibility for these institutions.

**Relationship Building**

Many of the program officers have made a commitment to building relationships around their funding. Care was displayed in the way many of the foundation officers were genuinely interested in building relationships with their grantees and even their intermediaries. It was clear that, for many foundations, the relationships prior, during, and even after the grant making process were important. There were foundations that indicated that they would ask their former grantees to help them think through new strategies or new request for proposals that they were making. When some foundations were asked on a scale from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important) about how important it was to have a connection to the institution they funded, many said 5. As one foundation
officer indicated, the scores for the relationship with the person managing the grant was a 5, but a score of 3 was more accurate in terms of making the decision about who gets the grant. This is so because decisions are made based on “if the project was not well considered or too expensive or not relevant to [their] work.” As one program officer stated, “we like to have a relationship with the institutions we fund.” Another program officer notes that relationship building is really important, but not like, “Here, let's give you gifts, and take you to these expensive dinners.” There is an expectation from many foundations that the relationship is built on authenticity and partnership. This expectation is important because, as one program officer indicates:

Really, honestly, relationships are really important . . . it is really important to build an open, honest relationship. We hear from our grantees and, again, they might say this to many funders, I don't know, but it is nice to hear it anyways, that we are a team where they can, we're not trying to put on a show when we get there. We show up and we're ready to have real honest conversation and it's okay to share with us if something's not working, or we have to pivot and change . . . we are a foundation where we're open to those conversations and we truly do want to be spot partners.

Despite foundations having indicated that intermediaries are more directly responsible for some of the work that they have done in the past with institutions, foundations appear still to have an expectation of developing a direct relationship with some funded institutions because they recognize that the intermediaries might not have the direct contact on-site with the institutions that they have valued in prior grant making.
I would say it's incredibly important because, ultimately, A: you want to demonstrate that you actually have authentic relationships with these institutions. In some cases, these institutions . . . and intermediary might represent a set of institutions, but they don't have those direct and intimate relationships with those folks on the ground or on those campuses; they might just be simply a convener of this group, or they just try to facilitate a network and network-sharing across . . . across a set of institutions.

Foundations are seeking out institutions that meet the criteria for their specific mission by leveraging the relationships between intermediaries and grantees. Through these intermediaries, foundations can work with institutions with whom they would otherwise have no relationship.

So, if you're going through HACU, okay. We might seek out a relationship with HACU and say, "We're looking to engage some of your member institutions around this particular effort." So, it may not have to be direct. It may be through this kind of third party, either membership organization or organizations like Excelencia in Education if we're targeting Latinx students.

Some program officers have made a commitment to creating relationships with the students that they support. In the case of one program officer, she would like funded students to be mentors and role models for students who are facing similar challenges.

It's frankly a challenge for us that we've been trying to strategize around over the last couple of years is how do we create relationships with the students as the recipients so that when they do graduate there's a relationship that can extend beyond the funding transaction.

This same program officer, who works for a foundation that funds within its city, indicated that the foundation tries to visit 50% of their grantees each semester because that is where it all “coalesces,” meaning it is able to see how funds are being spent and the impact they have on students. Other program officers mentioned making “site visits with every grant before recommending” funding for institutional projects. One program
officer described how they enjoyed these visits and how the opportunity to get a sense of the student body by visiting classes related to their ethos of care. Such activities show a more than cursory interest in the way their grants are being managed and the students they serve. Overall, these activities demonstrate a commitment to, and responsibility for, not only the students but also the institutions that are supporting the students they care about.

Foundations are also showing a significant commitment to understanding and keeping abreast of what is happening in higher education, particularly relating to the populations for which they have a social-justice and equity agenda. This aim was sometimes articulated by program officers who did not have particular expertise in higher education. This was not surprising, as this is a shortcoming of today’s foundations that is recognized in the literature as a lack of “bench strength” (Gose, 2013). As such, foundations do not have enough staff with a background in higher education making decisions on their higher education giving. This can be an issue and a source of tension related to foundations’ giving because it can result in mission drift. As one foundation officer describes it:

One of the challenges with strategic philanthropy is it’s very power-up, power-down. It's in some ways, we're dictating work that needs to be done, or that we perceive as things that need to be done. That sometimes can cause a little bit of a mission drift within the organization, because they're interested in seeking out the fund[s].

Even though that may be true, program officers are making a commitment to bridging this gap by being voracious gatherers of information regarding what is happening in “the field” of higher education. Means of gathering information regarding
“the field” and what is happening on “the ground” occurs through a variety of mediums for program officers. Those I interviewed indicated that they read “media articles . . . journal articles . . . research . . . commissioned studies . . . reports . . . blogs.” The program officers then triangulate the information they gather to make funding decisions. According to one study participant, the genesis for one of their foundations’ RFPs “in part came from reading the higher ed press and the like.” Their data gathering impacts their strategies related to giving. Such interest in data indicates, in general, an interest in the work of higher education. Specifically, foundations care if the initiatives they fund and strategies they employ are aligned with current practices in higher education.

Foundations engaged those in the field and on the ground through listening tours in higher education. One program officer spoke of “listening sessions” in which the foundation sought varied input to determine if it was making progress and needed to adjust accordingly. This approach reflects a certain level of trust in grantees. As one foundation officer stated, listening ensures that the foundation is not “living in a vacuum.” Another program officer explained, “we’re listening hard to get an insider perspective.” These insider perspectives evolve from a variety of sources, including meetings with administrators, faculty, students, and intermediaries. Although philanthropy is a “power-up, power-down” relationship, foundations are attempting to make decisions based on guidance from the institutions or those with insider knowledge of the institutions they care about.

Many of the participants also discussed intentional listening and learning that occurs across foundations. This intentional listening and learning were often defined by
program officers as taking the opportunity to understand current practices in higher
education. More than half the study participants indicated that they attended conferences
on student success at both national and regional levels, such as Educause, National
College Access, Achieving the Dream, Great Lakes Student Success Conference, and
American Association of Community Colleges. The participants indicated that
engagement in these listening sessions was a means for developing “authentic
relationships” with institutions that does not occur when working with intermediaries.
What foundations call “convenings” were other ways in which they learned what was
occurring “on the ground.” Convenings were described as the coming together of
grantees, experts in the field, institutional leadership, and others to meet and discuss what
might be occurring related to a certain topic.

At conferences and convenings, program officers engaged in a variety of
behaviors to support institutions, including hosting an event and facilitating and attending
workshops. Foundations admittedly “use the power of convening” to bring together
higher education leaders to assist them in analyzing what they want to do. Feedback on
their ideas and RFPs serve to ensure that foundations are getting it right. For example,
according to another participant, the goal behind the convening of a group of faculty was
to get a sense of what they were thinking and how the foundation’s ideas resonated with
them. These events serve the dual role of not only learning but also allowing foundations
the opportunity to assess if institutions have the same “ethos of care” for students that the
foundations profess. Foundations are showing deliberate thought and care in the way that
they are approaching their work.
Foundations’ concern for grantees is also manifested in their efforts to support potential grantees that are at risk of not being funded or losing funding. One foundation officer explained how they might support a grantee whose institution wouldn’t necessarily meet the foundation’s criteria.

Certain things that maybe I want to protect my grantees from revealing from the foundation. I have to get into the . . . foundation boards can be really judgmental, so if you have a 30% six-year graduation rate, sometimes, we have to have a. . . . We have to not lead with that.

This effort to get the best outcome possible for an institution reflects care as foundations demonstrate a sense of commitment to, and responsibility for, the grantee. One program officer mentioned going into the office on a weekend to work through a budget issue for a grantee that would not have been able to pay staff during the next pay period. This same program officer shared the following story regarding helping a grantee get the most funds possible by being strategic:

I actually had an organization get their application in. I reviewed it, I prepped it, I was getting ready to get it up for review, and then I could kind of see . . . it's kind of like this unspoken picking up cues and signals? And I could see that I could spot . . . and it was the end of the year. And, the end of the year, larger foundations like ours have, we're up against payouts, and so either we have an excess of funds, or we have to kind of quote-on-quote, get [the funding] out the door. It's a terrible expression.

This story is important as it provides some insight into the thought process of a program officer who describes what is it like when her foundation gets to the end of its fiscal year. This program officer has picked up on the “cues and signals” regarding the likelihood of the foundation having an excess of funds. As a result, she calculated that a November submission would secure more money for the grantee. However, she recognizes that such
a change might throw the grantee off kilter regarding the submission time frame. She goes on to describe this process as follows:

Or [at certain times of year], we're like overburdened or overwhelmed with proposals that we're trying to get through. So, either we have too much, or we don't have enough. I had this organization, and it was like an August board meeting, and I said, "I can put you up for this board meeting in two weeks. Everything is ready to go, but if you wait until November, I might actually be able to get you $500,000 more." And then it's like it throws people into this real confusion.

This same program officer also shared her recommendation to development officers, which is to get their letter of intents (LOIs) in early. That enabled her to work with the grantees to ensure they are employing “foundation language” and that the LOI was aligned strategically with the foundation’s mission. This early submission also allows for the program officer to determine fit, and in cases where this is not the case, she will seek out other funding opportunities. For this program officer, her role does not always end with her foundation’s decision to support (or not) the prospective grantee. It ends when she has done all that she can to help a grantee successfully acquire funding.

She advises the development directors:

And so, I would say the development directors really need to get things in early. I try to tell them when they write their concept notes, and their LOIs that they have to use foundation language, and recycle that, and look for the strategic alignment with their own mission, and their own values. So, I do a lot of coaching, because I'm a trained sociologist, so this power-up, power-down thing I'm used to.

And, when it is warranted, she draws on her experience as a development officer:
So, I do that stuff. I do a lot of networking, and resource sharing. I do everything that I can to . . . I kind of put my development officer hat on, and if there's a project that I think could be a good fit at another foundation, I will ask for permission to take that project to another foundation. I will talk to that foundation about co-funding, or funding one phase of it, or they'd fund another phase. I try to do everything that I can to partner with them, to provide capacity-building efforts. That's what's important to me.

We see here that this program officer is strategically thinking about how to get the grantee more money, helping the grantee to understand how to write a successful grant in the rhetoric of the foundation, and leveraging her position as a program officer to promote the grantee’s project with other foundations. All these things indicate an ethos of care, as the foundation demonstrates a sense of commitment and responsibility toward the grantee.

Many of the program officers spoke about how they supported grantees in the grant-writing process by helping them to get the “foundation language” correct before it goes before the decision-making board. Some program officers discussed engaging in multiple rewrites with their grantees. At one foundation, this process can be overwhelming as they place a high premium on writing, and the process appears grueling for some institutions, particularly for institutions that are not in the medallion category. The program officer describes it:
So, our foundation, in particular, has extraordinary high writing conventions. It's very hard for new institutions, there is a kind of high academic writing expectation, and often, the people at minority-serving institutions that are writing these grants are not experienced grant writers, so even just the fundamentals of writing can be a problem. It is frequently the case that we get proposals where there are basic issues, there are grammar issues, and there are typos, and there are spelling, and this foundation in particular is merciless about that, so for us, it becomes really important, as a diversity unit, to make sure they get it from the beginning. . . This is this type of foundation and we don't want a poorly written proposal to reflect on the business of diversity, right? I mean, I don't want my colleagues thinking about a certain set of institutions as not worthy 'cause they can't write pristine proposals. So, we work very hard with draft after draft where we mark them all up from the point of view of the writing.

Such concern about grantees’ writing indicates foundations’ ethos of care because they want to see the grantees do well and are willing to extend themselves to ensure the grant has a chance for success.

Another foundation officer, though not specifically addressing HSIs, indicated that he does see a difference in institutions that have more sophisticated grant offices. And by “sophisticated,” as one program officer clarifies, this does not mean smarter people, just that “they have a development office. They have a person that does the grant writing. It skews toward that end.” Another program officer describes how she views institutions that do not have a long history of fundraising as such:

In general, we have noticed there's a difference between more sophisticated organizations that have a longer history of fundraising than those that are newer to it. And, this is clear from our work with community colleges, at some of the non-flagship state universities.

Foundations have a certain care for those institutions that are new to securing foundation funds. One program officer sums it up nicely.
We're always just willing to take the time to have those conversations that help them learn. We don't do anything specific to change what they're doing, but just to help be a . . . walk through the process with them.

Summary

The program officers I interviewed clearly demonstrate an ethos of care with regard to low-income, first-generation, and minority students and the institutions that enroll and serve these students. Most of the program officers interviewed echoed similar sentiments of “believ[ing] deeply in diversity because . . . it’s a core component to how we’re going to get to more equitable solutions, and a more equitable world.” As my findings indicate, foundations are deeply committed to social justice and equity, particularly for students they care about. This commitment takes many forms, including working through intermediaries and institutional networks, gaining knowledge, sharing more broadly, and collecting and analyzing data for larger impact.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Philanthropy doesn't have real accountability to anyone. Sort of the top of the food chain in that other than the federal government making sure that we're... Yeah, spending our 5% and there's no real conflict of interest. I mean, you know, there's a lot of leeway in what we can do, what we see as success. (Foundation Program Officer)

As a result of foundations’ pervasive role in higher education, I embarked on this study to understand foundations’ decision-making with regard to funding Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). HSIs educate over 60% of the U.S. Hispanic population, which according to the 2018 United States Census accounted for 18.1% of the nation’s total population (“Hispanic Heritage Month,” 2018). Yet, HSIs are characteristically underfunded (“(Re)constructing Hispanic,” 2010) and occasionally threatened in federal budget discussions (Dervarics, 2011). Although foundations will not take the place of government funding, funding from foundations can make a significant difference in HSIs’ ability to fulfill their mission with regard to the students they serve. In order to understand this important source of funding to HSIs, my study explored the following questions:

1. What factors motivate foundations’ decisions to support HSIs?
2. How does the HSI identity influence foundation giving to HSIs?
3. What are the characteristics of these institutions that shape funding decisions?
4. What is the role of institutional advancement offices in foundation giving to HSIs?
Overall, I found that central to foundation giving to higher education was the extent to which an institution serves low-income, first-generation, and minority students, which I refer to throughout this and other chapters as “students foundations care about.” These students are embraced by foundations because “inequality is one of the most enduring features of our nation’s higher education system” (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017, p. 5). For the foundations that have missions of social justice and equity, closing the achievement gap for the students they care about aids in meeting those agendas. Further, the ways in which foundations are engaging with higher education was not surprising, as many of the themes from my study were supported by the literature. However, what was not obvious in the literature was the way in which foundations demonstrate what I have termed an ethos of care for the students they care about and those at the institutions that serve them. The chapter is organized around my themes and primary finding related to ethos of care.

**Limited Role of HSI Identity in Grant Making**

One of the findings from my study was that an institution’s HSI identity had a limited role in foundations’ giving to the institution. This finding would not surprise McClure, et al., (2017), as they found that foundations typically serve wealthier institutions, which are usually highly selective. As mentioned, institutions that serve a significant portion of Hispanic students are significantly underfunded. This critique by McClure, et al., (2017) might be plausible for some of the foundations I interviewed: I found that one foundation funded primarily liberal arts institutions with high graduation rates; one foundation indicated that it has primarily funded prestigious institutions;
another indicated it is just beginning to think about funding community colleges; and two indicated that they only fund institutions with high graduation rates. Many HSIs might not meet one of more of these criteria and, as a result, foundations might not fund HSIs because of that designation. However, they fund initiatives that serve the students they care about at different institutions, including some that do not meet the 25% full-time Hispanic enrollment threshold necessary to qualify as an HSI.

In contrast, another reason that the HSI identity might not influence foundation giving is that unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), HSIs are not an established group of institutions that share a common organizational identity. The HSI identity was termed a “proxy” by one program officer for students that are low-income, first-generation, and minority—students all of the foundations in the study cared about. In fact, one program officer indicated that the federal government’s definition of an HSI was “in some ways, kind of arbitrary.” This point was particularly highlighted by a foundation officer’s perception of HSIs as a regionally comprehensive institution:

[They are] comprehensive, [sharing] something in common, they share a certain kind of curricular commitment, right, to cover everything from the liberal arts normally through the business disciplines, and including the trades and the certificates and the professional discipline. They are usually pretty large, they are often enrollment dependent, they are often, they are almost. . . . The majority of them are public institutions, and so of course, they share the idea of having a mission in which they are accountable to the state and to the electorate.

Though this description represents one foundation’s perception, according to the growing number of institutions that are qualifying as HSIs, this characterization of HSIs is not quite accurate. There are many HSIs that are not comprehensive nor are they public. In
fact, there are many Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) that are HSIs or emerging HSIs, and they are neither comprehensive nor public. Nevertheless, this foundation officer’s perception of HSIs suggests that, as a group, HSIs that are truly interested in serving the Latino population have to do a better job of defining themselves and building an organizational identity that is rooted in how they serve Latino students.

In fact, this absence of a shared organizational identity resulted in two program officers indicating that they are attempting to understand what really characterizes an HSI because their foundations are more interested in HSIs that are *serving* Hispanic students than those that are just *enrolling* these students. In other words, some of the foundations in my study were trying to gauge which institutions provide the services necessary for Latino students to graduate. These foundations were not interested in institutions that, according to Smith-Barrow (2018), are only interested in the HSI identity as a means of accessing grant funds and as a means of recruiting minority students during this period of declining undergraduate enrollment.

One foundation officer indicated he shared a concern about the differences between an HSI-serving versus HSI-enrolling institution. This same program officer contends that Excelencia, an advocacy organization for Latino students, is putting in place a “very new program, but it's like a certification program for colleges, for HSIs to work toward . . . to demonstrate the institution's commitment to improving Latino students' success.” The implementation of such a program would aid foundations in identifying the institutions that serve the students foundations care about. Such a certification or clearer indicators of whether an HSI serves Latino students would also
provide higher education stakeholders with a better understanding of what it means to be
an HSI.

Regardless of the lack of any single definition of HSIs, foundations are interested
in institutions that provide equitable higher education opportunities for the students they
care about and the services they need to graduate. As one foundation officer indicates:

Well, so we care deeply about [Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)], and while
there's a great variety of each category of MSIs, HSIs are an interesting group
because, again, some are not particularly committed to the students that define
HSIs and so I think we are committed to those HSIs that are committed and
effective with Latinos, but we're not necessarily committed to every institution
that gets named as an HSI.

Not surprisingly, Garcia (2013) found that HSIs “need recognition and legitimacy in
order to foster support for state and local governments as well as the general public” (p.
19). My study suggests that this finding is also true for foundations. Even though the HSI
identity had a limited role in foundation giving, HSIs, by default, serve a population that
foundations care about. Therefore, HSIs must foster greater recognition and legitimacy
related to being Hispanic-serving to garner support from foundations that are interested in
how they are serving the students they care about. There is an abundance of literature that
distinguishes what it means to be Hispanic-serving versus Hispanic-enrolling (Contreras,
et al., 2008; Garcia, 2013; Malcom, 2010; Smith-Barrow, 2018). This literature indicates
that Hispanic-serving institutions engage in intentional practices (faculty and curriculum
development and targeted student support services) to support Latino students in attaining
degrees (Garcia & Taylor, 2017; Santiago, 2009). It is therefore not enough for
institutions to have the HSI moniker; HSIs must also prove to foundations that they are
indeed Hispanic-serving, which for foundations means they are closing the attainment gap for students they care about.

**Social Justice and Equity**

The foundations in my study were concerned about the disparities in educational attainment based on race and income, markers that result in the perpetuation of socioeconomic stratification in our nation (Gladieus & Swail, 1999, as cited in Lohfink & Paulson, 2005). This finding underpins much of what we know about today’s foundations: they have, in some way, borrowed or continue in the framework of foundations of the past, which supported initiatives concerned with public policy, race, and social class (Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). Further, as the literature highlights, social justice and equity are also the current foci for policymakers and higher education leaders (Kelly & Lugo, 2017; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017). And, as the foundations in my study indicate, they spend a significant amount of time staying current with the landscape of higher education to determine their strategies to close the achievement gap, thereby promoting social justice and equity through higher education.

Scholars such as Brennan and Naidoo (2008) view social justice and equity as “feel good” concepts that have received significant policy attention but have yet to receive an agreed upon and precise meaning. Rather than trying to define social justice and equity, Zajda, et al. (2006, p. 13) frame one’s understanding of social justice and equity as a question: “How can we contribute to the creation of a more equitable, respectful, and just society for everyone?” Throughout my interviews, most program officers responded in some way to elements of this question as they discussed the
missions of their organizations pertaining to the students they care about. This was particularly the case for program officers that had larger portfolios outside of higher education, which included areas such as global issues of health and poverty.

The foundations in my study recognized, as have others, that students they care about are “inhabit[ing] intersecting sites of oppression based on race, class and gender” (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005, p. 418). As one foundation officer indicated, his foundation is focusing on closing the equity gap so that “race and income are no longer predictors of academic attainment.” Today, there is quantitative evidence that education does in fact contribute to closing the gap for lower-income populations that the foundations focused on poverty alleviation care most about. For example, research by Stanford’s Center on Poverty and Equity has shown that for low-income students, college enrollment often results in movement from the bottom fifth to the top fifth of the income distribution (Wong, 2017). This research indicates that higher education influences social mobility. Many HSIs were on the list of institutions that are moving students to the top fifth of the income distribution, thus promoting upward mobility for low-income, first generation, and minority students. As several of the program officers articulated, their foundations are committed to advancing “upward mobility” or “economic mobility” for low-income students. There is an underlying assumption by the foundations in the study that institutions closing the equity gap for Latino students are also closing the equity gap for the larger population of underrepresented students. In supporting HSIs, foundations are serving all the students they care about in one transaction.
Despite the belief among the foundation officers in the study that higher education can close the equity gap and promote social mobility, it is important to note that some scholars actually disagree with this premise. Brennan and Naidoo (2008) question whether higher education, as a driver of the meritocratic status quo, might actually be more of an obstacle to equity and social justice than is typically recognized. Whereas liberal thinkers and sociologists see higher education as driving social mobility, an opposing viewpoint emphasizes that education reproduces privileges, secures the legitimacy of capitalism, and prepares students for differentiated social positions within society (Moore, 2004, as cited by Brennan & Naidoo, 2008). In other words, education systems reproduce a division between societal elites and non-elites, preparing students for differentiated positions in society. The history of HBCUs (and philanthropic giving to HBCUs from the time of their inception) might seem to support this “elite reproduction” critique. Foundation support for African American institutions was an attempt to control curricula, and thereby prospective laborers, in order to ensure the manpower necessary for the industries of the 20th century (Anderson, 1988; Gasman, 2007). Similar objections to philanthropic involvement in higher education are heard today with regard to foundations such as the Koch Family Foundation, which has been accused of trying to control institutional curricula through their giving.

Despite these critiques, educating the Hispanic population is crucial to today’s 21st-century economy. In fact, educating all underrepresented populations is an enduring social issue. Research indicates that economically disadvantaged students are the recipients of 39% of foundation giving (McGill, 2018). Thus, it was not surprising that
the HSI identity plays a limited role in giving, as half of the program officers in the study were primarily focused on an overt social-justice and equity mission rather than a broader higher education mission, even if higher education accounted for a significant portion of their giving.

**Limited Role of Institutional Advancement in Giving**

Another finding that emerged from my study was that institutional advancement does not necessarily play an important role in the grant process with the foundation officers interviewed. In listening to the interviews, the cadence and tones of the participants, which cannot be heard from a transcript, conveyed that institutional advancement offices are mostly a non-factor in the decision-making process. Foundations admitted that they interacted with development officers at conferences and development officers are present when foundations meet with an institution regarding funding, but these officers act as facilitators. In some cases, development officers are the ones that make the connection between the foundation and others in the organization. My study suggests that foundations’ engagement with development officers differs from how development offices engage with individual donors, which has been extensively addressed in the literature on philanthropic giving.

Although institutional development officers certainly played a valued, supporting role in foundation giving to HSIs, my study found that institutional leadership drives foundation giving to a far greater degree. This finding is in line with the literature, which indicates that presidents shoulder the responsibility for the success of raising funds on behalf of the institution and not the professional staff (Hodson, 2010). As one program
officer indicated, “We look at the leaders and sort of the investment that [the] leader has made as part of, you know, his or her institution.” Another foundation officer indicated, when they work with really big institutions, they first build relationships with the presidents and provosts. Through the presidents, the foundations in my study try to understand how the institutions see themselves, particularly how the institutions actualize their missions and how their missions fit within how the institutions currently function. One foundation officer described it as “exciting” to speak with a president who is well known, particularly for getting things done within that institution. Another foundation indicated that they engage in regular convenings of presidents because they always want to “get information from the field.”

Although not a prominent finding across my interviews, provosts were also seen as important leadership with whom foundations should engage. However, this finding contradicts Hodson (2010), who indicates that along with the president, it is the deans who play the primary role in leading efforts related to giving. The deans were mentioned by several of the foundation officers in my study; however, according to my participants, the provost played a more prominent role than deans in shaping their perception of institutions and their funding needs. In fact, a provost was the next-most-important person in leadership—alongside a college or university president—with whom foundations engage to understand if the institution is truly committed to the students they care about.
Limited Funding

Commitment to the students foundations care about requires significant investment. I found that 10 of the 12 foundations in my study stated that they have limited funding to give to higher education institutions. This, in and of itself, is a point of interest given that foundation assets are at unprecedented levels and the U.S. has reached another era of unparalleled wealth, similar to the time of the Robber Barons (the wealthy industrialists of the late 19th century). However, Rhodes (2018) explains that since the financial crash of 2008, foundations have developed a conservative mindset—a “do more with less” attitude about their resources. Foundations therefore are strategizing ways to stretch their dollars more than ever before (Rhodes, 2018). Despite some of the foundations in the study being among the world’s wealthiest, they, like the smaller foundations, expressed concern about the limited funds at their disposal. One program officer indicated that foundation funding should be more for institutional “innovation” because foundation funds cannot “replace solid money.” This finding might not be surprising, for as Porter and Kramer (1999) indicated, “A foundation creates value when it achieves an equivalent social benefit with fewer dollars or creates greater social benefit for comparable cost” (p. 10).

As indicated in the literature, my study also found that foundations are highly targeted in their giving, particularly to initiatives that support students they professed to care most about. Some foundations were also what Rhodes (2018) termed “hyper issue-focused” (para. 2), mostly with regard to closing the equity gap surrounding graduation rates for lower-income, first-generation, and minority students. Although foundations
display concern and urgency about closing the attainment gap for underrepresented students, there are many who believe that foundations have a hidden agenda and, in contrast, those who believe that this new agenda provides value for higher education (Dodgson & Gann, 2018). My findings suggest that foundations’ agenda for students they care about is rather straightforward, closing the attainment gap for underrepresented students. HSIs will have to determine if foundation giving is providing value or if foundations are exerting the type of control with their financial resources that is not in line with the mission and vision of the institution.

**Evolving Strategies Related to Networking and Collaboration**

My study indicates that foundations are interested in strategies that provide value, and these strategies are influenced by what they are learning at conferences, as well as reading about and hearing from those with whom they have convenings. One program officer stated that her foundation is actively “shaping strategy” and “reshaping strategy” over time. For foundations, “strategy refinements and strategy refreshers” are standard. According to Callahan (n.d.), foundations’ strategies are no longer long-term processes; they have sped up their processes with regard to developing successful strategies. Speeding up processes means that foundations engage in so-called “strategy resets”—these can be a new focus or a new way of allocating funding—which they perceive as limited. As a result of foundations’ urgency to meet their equity agenda and because of their access to copious amounts of data and metrics, resetting of their approach to giving included the following: working with intermediaries and networks of institutions for greater impact, and collaborating with each other for collective impact.
Intermediaries

Working with intermediaries emerged as the most prominent foundation strategy in my study. Although foundations have had a history of direct funding, my study found that today they are allocating their grants through intermediaries. The use of intermediaries by foundations represents a paradigm shift. Instead of funding individual institutions, most of the foundations in my study are leveraging intermediary organizations to enhance their work and achieve impact beyond their grant making (Walden, Marra, & Briddell, 2015). The literature characterizes this relatively new engagement with “intermediaries” as public-private partnerships (Robertson & Verger, 2012; Srivastava & Oh, 2012). According to Szanton (2003), 21st-century foundations are increasingly utilizing intermediaries to accelerate their work with regard to closing the attainment gap in higher education. Often these intermediaries already have relationships with networks of institutions and can leverage these relationships for greater impact.

Further, my content analysis of foundations’ grant making on their websites also provides evidence of this paradigm shift. Most of the recent grant-making patterns of foundations reflected that they are directly funding more higher education intermediaries and think tanks than institutions. This was particularly true of the larger foundations. Even though the literature indicates that others in higher education observe this as foundations’ attempt to exert control over higher education (Levinthal, 2015; McCluskey, 2017), there are scholars such as Kelly and Lugo (2017) who are thankful for the efforts by foundations to close the attainment gap by engaging in activities to close the equity
 Foundations in the study appear to believe that intermediaries such as Excelencia and HACU provide the opportunity for the “limited” funding that foundations have to reach more students for greater impact.

**Networks of Institutions**

My findings also indicated that foundations are not only working with intermediaries, but they are also leveraging their limited assets by funding networks of institutions. According to one program officer, her foundation supports networks of institutions to improve institutional systems and processes that improve her foundation’s capacity to serve students. By doing so, foundations are hoping that they can give, as one foundation officer indicated, “[a] kind of purpose and direction for these campuses to work together and do something new and innovative.” Another foundation describes the intent of funding collaborations of institutions as a means of investing in the community of institutions to promote growth among the respective institutions. These examples from the interviews demonstrate that foundations hope to assemble groups of institutions to pool their resources collectively and thereby achieve the broader goal of implementing policies and procedures, and developing an orientation that supports the students they care about.

It is the foundations’ hope that these institutions, working together, can bring about initiatives that are “scalable” and “replicable” to be shared more broadly with other institutions. In so doing, groups of institutions are able to advance the common goal of the majority of the foundations in closing the equity gap. One foundation is funding 11 large research institutions to improve degree-attainment rates for low-income, first-
generation, Pell-eligible minority students. What foundations are trying to accomplish is
summed up nicely by one foundation officer: “There is something that can be learned and
shared from the work that [is] funded that others might benefit from.” Working with one
institution at a time will not move forward a foundation’s equity agenda. As one
foundation officer indicated, “It’s difficult to reach our goal one institution at a time.”

**Collective Impact**

My conversations with foundation officers corroborated the findings of current
philanthropic scholarship that foundations collaborate with other foundations holding
similar grant-making values for greater impact (Gose, 2013). Foundations today are
working together for collective impact with regard to shared agendas to fight widening
social inequalities. As one of the program officers in my study indicated, working
together gives stronger advocacy to institutions that are supporting the students they care
about.

Foundations working together is a relatively new concept but a continuing trend
(Rhodes, 2018). Research shows that, in 2016, nonprofit collaborations are higher than
they have ever been (Samali, Laidler-Kylander, Simonin, & Zohdy, 2016). Samali,
Laidler-Kylander, Simonin, and Zohdy (2016), interviewing 30 U.S.-based and
international nonprofits across fields including education, found that nonprofits work
together to increase their organizational effectiveness and drive social and systemic
change. This point was also demonstrated by one of the program officers in my study,
who stated that it is helpful when foundations are aware of what the others are doing so
as to determine whether there are opportunities for collaboration. Further, according to
the same program officer, it is helpful when they all come together, as “there are a lot more pros than cons in being in the loop with each other and trying to communicate and coordinate.” Working together is another way in which foundations are able to operate more efficiently and stretch their funds.

According to Rhodes (2018), the aforementioned strategies are part of wider trends that have been evolving among funders and continuing to evolve today. However, there are scholars who are not pleased with foundations’ intentional strategies, political involvement, and focus on higher education metrics of success (Barkan, 2013; Gose, 2013; Hess, Henig, & Hatfield, 2016). Although these strategies do not reflect the patterns of foundations of the past, which often founded and funded one institution at a time (Strickland, 2007), these trends are continuing (Rhodes, 2018). In addition, despite concerns that these strategies are ways for foundations to exert control over institutions’ policies and practices, foundations appear to be engaging in innovative strategies that are being perceived as the hallmarks of today’s 21st-century philanthropy—engaging intermediaries, funding networks of institutions, and working together for collective impact.

Prioritizing Student Success and Institutional Transformation

My study also found that foundations are interested in institutions that prioritize student success, which is a driver for grant making. Student success is highly correlated with graduation rates based on the participants interviewed. Many of the foundations are interested in grant making to improve educational equity and graduation rates for the students they most care about. There was a general understanding among the program
officers in this study that a quality education that leads to graduation can impact students’ economic mobility (and the “economic competitiveness” of the nation). This point is in line with research that shows that not attending college or leaving college early has negative monetary and occupational outcomes (Tinto, 1993), thereby impeding social mobility for students foundations care about. As one foundation officer indicated, a college degree in today’s economic landscape is needed “to achieve the American dream.”

My study also indicates that to gain the attention of foundations, institutions must demonstrate that they are moving the needle, or they have an interest in moving the needle on college attainment. As one foundation officer indicated, it is not enough for institutions to say they are revolutionizing student success; they must make the case that they are doing so. If they are unable to make the case in their three- or four-page proposals, this foundation questions if they are “really as good as they say.” Further, if the foundation has never heard of their work, they are skeptical that it is really occurring. This particular foundation officer considers whether an institution is present at higher education conferences and if it is listening to what other institutions are doing to transform. Institutional interest in closing the attainment gap is of particular import to foundations.

Transformation in the context of this study means that foundations are interested in institutions that are increasing graduation rates for underrepresented students and closing the equity gap. There is a sense of urgency about closing the equity gap for the students foundations care about; however, one foundation officer recognized that this
process “is really long and intensive.” Transformation for this program officer is an ongoing, cyclical, “living process” whereby an institution must continually adjust to current challenges. Despite challenges, this program officer believes that colleges and universities can transform “their education models as well as their business models to eliminate the attainment gaps and improve credential efficiency.” Foundations believe transformation is replicable; therefore, they support institutions sharing their work widely as a means of assisting others in the process.

**Ethos of Care for Grantees**

Through the aforementioned trends, I observed my primary finding from this study, which is that foundations display what I am calling an “ethos of care” for the students they care about and the institutions that support them. This care, as I have described it in chapter 4, can be defined as a “nurturing way of relating to a valued other toward whom one feels a personal sense of commitment and responsibility” (Dalpezzo, 2009, as cited in Stroehlein, 2016, para. 3). The meaning of such an ethos of care takes a specific form in a grant-making context, where increasing emphasis is placed on collaboration and networking. Specifically, “to care,” in the words of the varied foundation officers in the study, means a commitment and responsibility to “partnering with,” to “supporting,” to “building capacity,” to “learning what works,” to “networking,” to “sharing resources,” and to “building relationships.”

The phenomenon of care in education is relatively new. According to Owens & Ennis (2005), scholars began to conduct research around care based on the groundbreaking work of Nell Noddings in 1984 around the *ethics of care* in
education. “Noddings (1984) argues that caring should be at the heart of the education system” and its moral foundation (Owens & Ennis, 2005, p. 393). This concept of care represents Noddings’ theoretical framework around the ethics of care (Owens & Ennis, 2005). Characteristics of care in the literature is represented through such terms as “commitment,” to students, “establishing caring relationships,” and “relational practices” (Owens & Ennis, 2005). While much of the work around care has been done in the area of K-12 on teacher education to support the ethics of care in pedagogical content knowledge (Owens & Ennis, 2005), my findings indicate that there is application for this around higher education. My research culminated in the finding of an ethos of care for low-income, first-generation, and minority students that is at the heart of giving for most of the foundations in my study. And this ethos of care manifests itself in many ways throughout my study.

One clear way in which the ethos of care manifested itself is in the grant-writing process. Many foundations recognized that HSIs were not sophisticated or savvy in accessing foundation funds. As Drezner (2011) has observed, many HSIs are new to this area of development. Some program officers recognized and sympathized that at “struggling” institutions, the job of writing the grant might fall on someone who does not have grant-writing experience. Or, as one program officer indicated, it might fall on a person who has “10 other jobs” that do not include grant writing. The program officers shared that they are willing to work closely with institutions that may have limited success or experience in securing foundation grants. This support for such institutions
includes providing feedback on proposals and helping prospective grantees craft proposals that better reflect the mission and “language” of the foundation. Overall, some program officers recognize that some institutions are new to this work and that conditions on some campuses might contribute to proposals that are not fundable. For this reason, they have committed themselves to assisting these institutions so that they can have increased success in securing funding.

One of the most extreme cases of support during the writing stage was shared by a foundation officer who admitted that his foundation has extremely high standards of writing. In the case of this foundation, it typically takes six months to work with these “newer” institutions that the foundation has not previously funded. The program officer indicated that he understood the process, capabilities, and struggles of different institutions. Yet despite what appears to be a long and arduous process, this foundation officer is willing to go the distance to help these institutions to persevere and get the funding they need (by reviewing drafts, helping the institution to better conceptualize their proposal, and supporting it in producing a written proposal that is up to the foundation’s standards). This foundation officer indicates that he tries to protect these institutions that are new to fundraising “from colleagues making certain types of judgements about the institution.” He also indicated that when he meets these grantees, he apologizes for the arduous process. Overall, such behavior indicates a high level of commitment to the grantee and responsibility for ensuring that the grantee is shown in the best light possible. Foundation officers showed awareness and care with regard to
minimizing negative attributions to particular institutions (such as community colleges) that support a significant number of the students they care about.

Though most program officers are not experts in the field of higher education, they are striving, in multiple ways, to learn what is happening on the ground and how best to serve the students whose sociodemographic background is aligned with their foundation’s equity agenda. As mentioned, foundations demonstrate their interest in building institutional relationships by (a) using intermediaries, (b) funding networks for institutions, and (c) attending conferences and convenings. Despite the work that program officers are engaged in with regard to their grant making to higher education, some scholars criticize the mega foundations for exerting influence in higher education without the bench strength (i.e., staff with higher education experience), despite their significant financial resources (Barkan, 2013; Gose, 2013). This contradicts my finding, which indicates that foundations care for and value the grantees’ input on how funds can best be aligned with the needs of the institutions and the students they care about. For example, one program officer posited that foundations are not afraid to “pivot” or make changes in strategy once they have engaged in learning about what works. As a result of this learning, his foundation is making a strategy shift by making grants to institutions that they have not supported in the past, such as community colleges, HBCUs, and tribal colleges. As this program officer indicated, “We are increasingly open to learning about other grantees.”

Also supporting my finding about this ethos of care was participants’ discussion of the many ways in which they acquired learning related to the students they care about.
and the institutions that support these students. As one foundation officer indicated, they are showing up not with the answers but rather with questions and a willingness to learn more:

Hey, we were interested in this topic, we see that you're also interested in this topic. We're happy to share what we're learning in terms of how we're approaching this work, and we're interested in how you're approaching your work.

Again, I discerned here an unexpected motif of “care.” In this case, it was to find out more about the knowledge and approaches of potential grantee institutions. This foundation does not pretend to know all the answers. As one program officer indicated, they talk to their “grantees to try to shape a strategy.” Another program officer indicated that the foundation frequently engages in such “convenings” to learn more about grantees and add to its knowledge of the higher education landscape. In addition to convenings, foundation officers learn by attending conferences. Conferences appear to be one of the primary vehicles through which foundations gain a better sense of current practices in higher education. One program officer noted that conferences are a means by which foundation are able to learn about where there are “bright spots [and] where there are gaps.” Conferences were also a means by which program officers get the opportunity to speak with and hear from institutional leadership. As Barkan (2013) has indicated, instead of setting goals at such conferences, foundations used the conferences as a way to hear about what’s happening in higher education and to set strategies accordingly.

These diverse grantees are serving students that they care about, and as another program officer indicated, “I do deeply believe in diversity because I think it's a core component to how we're going to get to more equitable solutions and a more equitable
world.” Foundations care about (a) equity for low-income, first-generation, and minority students and the institutions that serve these students, and (b) making changes in strategy indicates a commitment to these outcomes.

Summary

Numerous scholars have explored the motives for philanthropic altruism on the part of individual donors (Andreoni, 1990; Cascione, 2003; Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). Indeed, most of the literature on philanthropic giving is focused on individual giving rather than foundation giving. Whereas public choice and social network theories can explain why individuals give, there is a paucity of information regarding foundations’ motives for giving. My findings suggest that foundations give to higher education organizations primarily because they see this as a way to improve social justice and equity. Overall, foundations display an ethos of care for institutions that are transforming or have a desire to transform. They seek to engage with strong and committed leaders whose visions are aligned with theirs. These foundations observe what is occurring in higher education to order to make sound decisions about their grant making for the students they care about. Institutional identity as an HSI or the presence of institutional advancement offices do not have nearly as great an impact on foundations as might be supposed. Rather, foundations see grant making to higher education institutions invested in the success of first-generation, low-income, and minority students as a path to closing the equity gap for disadvantaged populations.

The forms of such an ethos of care are woven throughout the varied themes that evolved from my study. Although the HSI identity had a limited role in foundation giving
to HSIs, foundations were interested in providing funding that would build capacity and assist institutions in closing the equity gap for the students served by HSIs. Even as institutional advancement offices had a limited role in foundation giving, foundations provided support to development officers to assist them in producing fundable grants. Further, foundations displayed a commitment and responsibility to expand opportunities for the students they care about, whether by funding intermediaries and networks of institutions or by working together to have a greater impact. Last, foundations were most committed to the institutions that demonstrated a commitment to student success in the form of better retention and graduation metrics. Across multiple interviews, I was struck by foundation officers’ repeated usage of the word “care,” as well as by their multiple examples of commitment and responsibility to low-income, first-generation, and minority students, and to the institutions serving those students.
CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is kind of an interesting double-edged sword too on private fundraising. (Program Officer)

**Reflections and Recommendations**

I recognize that while I interpret the data related to foundations’ interest in higher education as a means by which they meet their equity agendas, there are others who might interpret their interest to be a dominance that foundations are trying to exert over higher education (Gose, 2013; Katz, 2012; Kumashiro, 2012; Lederman, 2012; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). As a result, there is still much more work to be done to understand why foundations fund higher education organizations. In some ways, the present study demonstrates that higher education is best characterized as a vehicle for promoting equity for the foundations—a means to an end. Accordingly, “some management academics would say that the difference between goals and objectives is that a goal is a description of a destination, and an objective is a measure of the progress that is needed to get to the destination” (Morrison, 2011, para. 5). Higher education serves as a measure of foundations’ progress towards its equity agenda. There is also no doubt that higher education institutions serve as a measure of foundations’ outcomes with regard to their equity agenda.
Even as more research needs to be conducted, I believe that my research has begun to shed light on why foundation give to HSIs. I now reflect on these reasons by revisiting the questions that guided the present study.

**What factors motivate the decisions made by private foundations to support Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)?**

My study suggests that the primary factor that motivates foundations to support HSIs is that these institutions educate the students that foundations care about: low-income, first generation, and minority students. Foundation officers contend that they have an equity agenda, or as one foundation officer indicated, an equity imperative for educating particular students. The concept of equity is prominently featured throughout the 12 interviews, which is not surprising as foundations generally have invested in achieving positive social change.

Foundations are also motivated to give to HSIs when these institutions have strong leadership, which is often defined as a president who is committed to closing the equity gap and who has the fortitude to make changes. “Changes” here primarily refers to the ability to improve the graduation rate for students that foundations care about. Taken together, an ideal prospective grantee for foundations is an HSI that serves the population that foundations cares about, demonstrates that the institution is committed to foundations’ initiatives related to equity, and has the leadership that can make things happen.
How does the HSI identity influence private foundation giving to HSIs?

For the foundations in my study, I found that the HSI identity was a proxy for the students foundations care about. However, it does make sense that foundations were more interested in the students than the institutions, as these students are an extension of their equity agenda. It was not who the institutions were that motivated giving as much as what they were doing to graduate the students foundations care about and close the equity gap. Closing the equity gap for low-income, first-generation, and minority students is improving students’ economic mobility. According to Watkins (2001), educating black people was central to the shaping of modern America. Today, as a result of the exponential increase of the Hispanic population, educating Latino students and other underrepresented populations is central to the modern economic health of the United States. As the Hispanic population, in particular, grows, the urgency to close the equity gap will continue if institutions do not make the type of strides that some institutions—Georgia State and others—have made regarding degree attainment for minority students.

What are the characteristics of these institutions that shape funding decisions?

My findings indicate that several characteristics must coalesce for HSIs to attract foundation giving. These institutions must serve the students that foundations care about by engaging strategies that promote student success. Several foundations spoke about using data to transform an institution. Unsurprisingly, several foundation officers mentioned institutions that are publicly recognized for using data to implement change regarding graduation rates as models of success. This makes sense, as low graduation
rates are the metrics that have caused many to question the value of higher education for the students’ foundations care about.

**What is the role of institutional advancement offices in private foundation giving to HSIs?**

I was very surprised to find that the advancement office did not play as much of a role in giving as I would have thought. However, it is most likely because a foundation is not an individual, and the reasons for giving within the foundation may differ from the reasons for giving of an individual. As one foundation officer indicated, a foundation does not have the flexibility to say, “Gosh, the family got together at Thanksgiving and decided we need to fund more in this area. Or I met this wonderful young person and I think we should fund them.” This is not an option for a foundation that has a more structured hierarchy, meaning that program officers must answer to a board to justify why they want to fund an organization.

In light of notions that foundations are impersonal and uncaring entities liable to impose an agenda on higher education institutions, I was surprised that all of the foundation officers spoke about their “care” for students who were either low-income, first-generation, or minority. Beyond just saying that they cared, these foundation officers also demonstrated a commitment to learning about and supporting the institutions serving disadvantaged students.

**Limitations of the Study**

As I began to conduct the interviews and hear consistent themes, I became more interested in having a larger representation of foundations to determine if the themes
would remain consistent. However, the timing for the study did not align with the schedule for foundation officers. It appears that this time of year (the fall and early winter) is particularly busy for foundation officers, as many indicated that in the months prior to December they were particularly busy in preparation for board meetings.

The focus of my study on private foundations was also a limitation. It would have been preferable to focus on a broader array of foundations that give to HSIs. This would have probably increased the sample size, made the data richer, and improved generalizability. It also undoubtedly would have been more interesting for my readers if I had not been compelled to mask foundation identities. The ability to be candid while on the record might have assisted HSIs and others who serve the students they care about to better understand how to engage these foundations specifically, know what their expectations are regarding grant writing, and learn how to leverage their support with the writing process.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Based on what I learned, I would recommend that HSIs that have limited experience securing foundation funding do what two foundation officers suggested—go for the “low-hanging fruit.” This means beginning the process of engaging with local funders to learn about the process of responding to proposals. It might be in the best interest of institutions to begin small when they have less sophisticated advancement offices or, as one foundation noted, when the person writing the grant has 10 other jobs, of which grant writing is not one of them.
I would also recommend that HSIs ensure that their presidents and leadership are perceived as capable leaders who can make sound decisions and that these decisions reflect a commitment to the students foundations care about. Further, leadership needs to be ready at all times to speak about the work that their institution is engaged in and especially the metrics associated with this work. Data is important in today’s higher education landscape, and institutional leadership must demonstrate that data-informed decision making is central to their institution and that all members of the community have access to the data and are collaborating to make data-informed decisions and changes.

Further, institutions might want to consider the role of advancement officers when they are engaging funders. In other words, it will be incumbent on leadership from the institution to lead discussions if an advancement officer calls a meeting or reaches out to the foundation. Therefore, for institutions new to raising funds, the strategies that they employ to secure foundation giving must differ from those used to secure funding from individuals. I would recommend that institutions seeking funds specify how they work toward wider social equity and that they explicitly state their commitment to social justice and equity for low-income, first-generation, and minority students and their communities.

Higher education institutions must also ensure that they are participating in and attending conferences on student success. In addition to attending these conferences, institutions need to showcase their work, specifically highlighting how they are closing the attainment gap for students who are low-income, first-generation, and minority—those whom I have referred to throughout my study as students foundations care about. In
general, attendance at such conferences can build the institutions’ reputation, especially if that institution does not have a local or national brand but is doing good work in closing the attainment gap.

My study suggests that foundations view organizations making great strides in closing the attainment gap as an institution’s ability to transform itself, given that foundations are most interested in institutions striving to raise graduation rates for students they care about. Although it is believed that foundations want immediate results, my findings indicate that there are foundations that recognize that organizational transformation is complex and will take time.

My findings, not surprisingly, suggest that foundation giving is highly associated with how institutions are able to convey in writing, through their letters of intent or proposals, that their proposal aligns with the foundation’s mission. The participants in the study conveyed that institutions do not only need to have well-conceptualized proposals; rather, they need to have staff that can produce error-free proposals that clearly articulate the link to funder objectives. Many program officers indicated that they coached grantees with some of the basics of writing. Therefore, institutions need to ensure that they understand the mission of the foundations to which they are applying and that they are using their best writers and thinkers to develop proposals. It is also incumbent on institutions to learn the language of foundations, or as one foundation office referred to it, “foundation jargon.” It has always been the case that understanding the structure and nuances of language lends itself to better communication. This appears also to be the case when writing grants. This is particularly important for HSIs that are new to seeking
foundation funding. As mentioned, in cases where institutions are new to requesting foundation funding, these institutions might want to begin their foray into grant writing by working with local and smaller funders.

Last, foundations made it clear that their support is not meant to replace government funding. Institutions need to understand that foundation support is temporary and should not be seen as a component of the institutional base budget. As one program officer stated, there is a recent push to fund general operating institutional costs, but the personnel budget is too high, and her foundation cannot sustain it. Therefore, institutions need to think about foundations as potentially empowering innovation in the form of specific initiatives that have an end date. Institutions will need to communicate in proposals that their projects will solve a specific problem with the requested funds, or that longer-term initiatives can be sustained after the proposed project has been completed, if the need persists.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Although my findings provide insights into the reasons that foundations give to HSIs, more research is needed given the paucity of this literature. Another study on foundation giving could be enriched by segmenting institutions, for example, by looking at giving specifically to public, four-year HSIs or public HSI community colleges. Several foundations indicated that they are expanding their giving to support community colleges. Therefore, this is an opportune time to examine foundation giving to this category of institutions, as many of these institutions might not have established or sophisticated advancement offices.
The voices of the advancement officers were not included in this study. Including their voices would have added a richness to the study. Their voices would have provided an interesting juxtaposition, given that my findings indicate that the advancement officers have a limited influence on foundation giving. Furthermore, their perspective on how they work with foundation offices and how they perceive the role of foundation offices in assisting their institutions to access foundation funding would be insightful. In fact, their voices would help confirm whether they experience foundation officers’ support as care.

Most of the foundation officers spoke about closing the equity gap. As my study indicates, foundations are doing so through strategies such as funding intermediaries and networks of institutions. Using intermediaries appears to be a strategy that will continue in foundation giving. Future research should explore the impact of intermediaries in closing the equity gap. It should also examine how networks of institutions work across institutions to address the same issues, and what lessons are being learned.

It was oft repeated by many of the foundations that they are moving away from funding individual institutions. As one foundation indicated, for it to fund an individual institution, that institution must be “extraordinary in some way.” Research about what a foundation considers extraordinary, and the characteristics of institutions that are identified as such, would be beneficial to institutions that are seeking individual funding and not funding through intermediaries. Ultimately, for institutions to understand the nuances of giving by foundations will assist them in acquiring the funding they need to support their mission with regard to the students they serve.
Summary

Although I believe more than ever that grant making by foundations is important and will continue to be important to HSIs and emerging HSIs. I was struck by one program officer who stated, “You know, they’ve [HSIs] never raised private funds because they were well financed by their local communities or by the state government.” He wondered if helping these institutions to raise private funding is “helping them address a problem or are you actually undermining their status as a public good.” He further asked if “private funds can undermine support for public education, particularly when you find voters sometimes voting age and ethnically based blocks.” These are very thought-provoking questions, for which the answer in not always clear and for which we could benefit from more research.
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How would you describe how your foundation carries out its mission to support higher education?
2. Can you describe the process by which decisions related to giving to higher education institutions, in general, are made in your organization?
3. For the higher education institutions that you fund, in general, what are the common characteristics that these institutions share?
4. Follow-up: How do you identify institutions with these characteristics? What type of research and analysis, if any, are conducted concerning the institutions that you fund?
5. What does your foundation consider a substantial grant to an institution? Is the decision-making process the same for substantial versus non-substantial gifts?
6. During the decision-making process, in general, is your institution in contact with anyone at the institution?
7. Does having a personal contact at the institution assist in the decision-making process?
8. 6a. How important, on a scale of 1-5 (one being not important and five being important), that you have a connection at the institution?
9. As you probably know, in higher education, Hispanic-Serving Institutions are a rapidly expanding group of higher education institutions, which educate approximately 64% of all Hispanic students. Does your organization have a specific mission as it relates to giving to HSIs or MSIs?
10. I am sure that advancement offices reach out to you. In what ways does your foundation engage with institutional advancement/development offices when they reach out?
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