HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS’ MOTIVATIONS TO FORM AND
MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEGE ACCESS NONPROFITS

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the individuals and the entities that made me wonder about – and then care about – college access: who it is for, how it happens, and why it matters for all of us. This includes childhood friends, friends and classmates at The Lawrenceville School, my thoughtful colleagues in the Penn and Princeton Admissions Offices, and the many inspiring colleagues and students with whom I had the pleasure to interact when I worked in college admissions.
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Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Bobbi Kurshan – my boss these last five years. Without her flexibility and magnanimity this dissertation quite literally would not have been written. Thank you!
ABSTRACT

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS’ MOTIVATIONS TO FORM AND MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEGE ACCESS NONPROFITS

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This study uses mixed methods research to explore the phenomenon of partnerships between higher education institutions (HEIs) and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) focused on improving college access for diverse populations. Using available quantitative data, interviews and documentary evidence collected from nonprofit, four-year, private and public HEIs in Pennsylvania, this research seeks to understand whether relationships between HEIs and NPOs are a common feature of the college access landscape; how institutions understand relationships with college access nonprofits; how they use relationships to achieve particular goals including and in addition to improving college access for diverse populations; and what motivates institutions to engage in and sustain relationships. This research also considers whether there are relationships between institutional characteristics and undergraduate student diversity. Drawing from theoretical literature on the antecedents to partnership formation developed within the field of business and from organizational learning theory, this study finds that there is little agreement on what constitutes a relationship between HEIs and NPOs and a “college access nonprofit”; that HEIs rarely articulate specific, measurable goals for the enrollment of diverse populations; that relationships are used to improve direct and
indirect access to students, to build trust in HEIs, to fill perceived deficits for students and families, and to address demographic pressures. Furthermore, the study finds that relationships’ effectiveness is rarely measured and that ties between entities are rarely severed, except in the case of extreme failure to meet expectations. The findings of this study suggest that what HEIs refer to relationships are instead “less formal dyadic linkages.” HEIs forms ties to NPOs primarily in the pursuit of enhanced institutional legitimacy with respect to the recruitment of diverse students, which is perceived to enhance institutions’ ability to recruit these students with greater efficiency.

Relationships are also perceived to have potential to contribute to HEI’s ability to develop a pipeline of students. In addition, this study finds that the exploitation aspect of organizational learning helps explain relationship formation between HEIs and NPOs.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

[I]t’s become more evident to me, as I become more familiar with the demographics [that] we have a national need. If we do not educate them – the talent in this pool of students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education – it will have an adverse impact on the United States from an economic perspective, a political perspective, a cultural perspective…any perspective that you want that you want to identify.

~ Private college president, 25 years in higher education

The United States is an increasingly diverse nation both ethnically and socioeconomically. The U.S. racial and ethnic minority population grew 11 times as rapidly as the White non-Hispanic population between 1980 and 2000 (U.S. Census, 2010a). The Hispanic population alone more than doubled in the same time period (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002) and is projected to comprise almost 30% of the population in 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2014). The Black, American Indian and Alaskan Native, and Hispanic populations all skew young, suggesting a future surge in the number of college-aged people in these groups (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). Between 2011 and 2022, public school enrollment is expected to decline 6% among White students and 5% among Native students (Hussar & Bailey, 2013, p. 5). Enrollment of Black, Asian and Hispanic students is projected to increase by 2%, 20% and 33%, respectively, and among students of more than two races, enrollments are expected to increase 44% in this same time period (Hussar & Bailey, 2013, p. 5). The Northeastern United States and much of the Midwest are projected to experience decreases in pre-K through 12th grade enrollments between the 2013-14 school year and the 2025-26 school year. For Pennsylvania, the
expected decrease in school enrollments in this time period is over 5% (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a).

Despite the growing diversity of our youth, our institutions of higher education are failing to educate young people of color and those from the lowest socioeconomic brackets at the same rates as their whiter, wealthier counterparts. Minorities continue to be underrepresented in private and public U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) (Kena et al., 2014), and both low-income and minority students tend to be clustered at institutions with lower graduation rates (Horn, 2006). A 2016 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) shows that only 63% of recent high school completers (individuals ages 16 to 24 who had completed high school earlier in the calendar year) from low-income families had enrolled in postsecondary education in the same calendar year, as compared with 83% of those from high-income families (National Bureau of Economic Research, n.d.). Tuition and required fees at public four-year institutions rose from an average of $4,480 in 2000-01 to an average of $7,994 in 2014-15 (in constant 2014-15 dollars) (U.S. Department of Education, 2015c). For private nonprofit four-year institutions, the average cost of tuition and fees in 2000-01 was $21,284 and rose (in constant 2014-15 dollars) to $31,370 in 2014-15 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015c). Between 1993-94 and 2013-14, there was a 53% increase in net tuition and fees for public four-year institutions; for private four-year institutions there was a 22% increase (Baum & Ma, 2014).

Compounding these demographic trends are both declining year-over-year enrollments in higher education and related revenue stress. Nationwide undergraduate
enrollment in 4-year public and private institutions grew less than 2% in any single year between 2012 and 2015 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015). In both spring 2015 and fall 2015, enrollment at private four-year institutions declined over the previous year by 0.2% and 0.3%, respectively (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015). According to an investor service that issues credit ratings for colleges and universities, revenue stress will continue to threaten some colleges’ very existence. Moody’s (2015) predicted that college closures would accelerate, with 15 institutions per year closing their doors beginning in 2017. An impending surge in minority youth and the persistent underrepresentation of low-income and minority students in higher education, coupled with the rising costs of higher education, and flat or declining enrollments suggest a slow-moving but inevitable crisis in the U.S. higher education system. For a variety of reasons – ranging from the moral, to mission fulfillment, to financial security and even staving off institutional obsolescence – higher education institutions (HEIs) have a clear interest in increasing diversity on their campuses and increasing college enrollment more generally.

**Relationships: A Uniquely Flexible Solution**

In the last two decades, nonprofit organizations (NPOs) or Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have emerged as a potential mechanism to help higher education institutions increase applicants that mirror the country’s shifting demographics. Community Based Organizations (CBOs) are a subset of the category *nonprofit organization* (NPOs). They are typically “public or private, nonprofit organizations engaged in addressing the social and economic needs of individuals and groups in a
defined geographic area, usually no larger than a county” (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2012, p. 2). In the context of access to higher education, they can take a number of different forms, as described below:

*Direct service organizations* provide college information, advice, and application assistance to individual students and families; organize college awareness workshops, financial aid nights, and college fairs; and support students in high school through their college years. *Youth development organizations* often offer extended learning opportunities such as traditional after-school activities with an academic focus, apprenticeships and internships, summer enrichment and travel, and activities on college campuses. *Integrated student services organizations* work with schools to identify and assist individual students needing support with academic issues and non-academic problems that interfere with their school achievement by leveraging resources from appropriate agencies, including health care, social services, and counseling. (2012, p. 2)

The possibilities of collaborative relationships with these organizations are evident across a range of constituents who now advocate for relationships as a means to address college access issues. This includes nonprofit organizations (Hooker & Brand, 2008; National College Access Network, 2013; National Partnership for Educational Access, 2012) as well as corporations (Millett & Nettles, 2009), researchers (Barnett et al., 2012; Siegel, 2010) and the popular press (e.g., Leonhardt, 2014; Pérez-Peña, 2014).

Colleges are already engaged in a range of relationships designed to enhance institutions’ success in attracting, enrolling, and retaining students. In 2004, a group of 15 independent college and university presidents worked with the nonprofit Lumina Foundation to produce a volume entitled, *Powerful Partnerships: Independent Colleges Share High-impact Strategies for Low-income Students’ Success* (Ekman, Garth & Noonan, 2004). The aim was to “bring to th[e] national conversation [on private colleges’ collectively unaffordability to] a deeper understanding of how private colleges and
universities can encourage access to higher education by low-income students and facilitate and their educational achievement” (Ekman et al., 2004, p. 2). The piece summarized successful practices, which included meeting students’ financial need, targeting specific populations, and establishing a supportive academic culture (p. 3-5). Data on the spread of partnerships to address issues of college access are scant, but at a 2014 summit at the White House, more than 100 selective HEIs committed to increasing the number of low-income students on their campuses, with some HEIs proposing partnerships with college access as the mechanism to accomplish this (Furquim & Glasener, 2016). This action suggests the possibility that less selective institutions may begin to follow suit and establish ties to nonprofit organizations to help accomplish this goal.

Despite their potential, very little is known about the nature of the relationships higher education institutions form with organizations focused on addressing issues of college access, including how or why the relationships are initiated and maintained, the goals higher education institutions are trying to achieve, and the reasons that higher education institutions pursue and maintain a relationship with a non-profit organization to accomplish those goals. The lion’s share of public attention focuses on relationships between nonprofit organizations and higher education institutions that have a high academic profile and have achieved both brand recognition (e.g., Harvard, Stanford) and (very) low rates of admission (e.g., Leonhardt, 2014; Pérez-Peña, 2014; Wong, 2014, 2016). Less public attention focuses on non-elite institutions at all (for some attention to
non-elite institutions, however, see Casselman, 2016 and Leonhardt, 2017), let alone interactions these institutions may have with nonprofit college access organizations.

Similarly, few researchers have considered questions of the effectiveness of relationships between HEIs and NPOs. A recent study of QuestBridge, a prominent nonprofit that uses a partnership model and partners only with “36 elite colleges and universities,” used quasi-experimental methods to estimate the nonprofit’s effect on the college access of Pell eligible students (Furquim & Glasener, 2016, n.p). Study results suggested that the relationship did not measurably increase the representation of low-income students on partner campuses (Furquim & Glasener, 2016). While this study represents a significant advancement of our general knowledge as well as a step toward systematic study of these relationships, it tells us little about relationships with non-profit organizations among the 2,180 public and private nonprofit, 4-year U.S. institutions that are neither “elite” nor partners of this particular NPO (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). According to the Center for Education Policy Analysis, in 2004, 171 colleges held a ranking of “highly selective” and collectively these institutions served only 7% of 2004 high school graduates who enrolled in college within 12 months of high school graduation (Reardon, Baker & Klasik, 2012, p. 5).

Adrianna Kezar, a professor of higher education with a research focus on collaboration and partnerships, has pointed out the dearth of studies focusing on “typical” higher education institutions, defined as those “without significant funding to leverage partnerships and collaboration” (Kezar, 2005, p. 841). In a 2005 paper exploring how HEIs moved from a culture that supports individual work to one that supports
collaborative work, she noted the dearth of studies of collaboration at these institutions. She wrote,

many studies of collaboration or partnerships focus on models of excellence among elite or high-profile organizations and the findings are not often generalizable to other settings with more limited resources. (Kezar, 2005, p. 841)

Still, relationships between nonprofit college access organizations and less selective institutions are as yet understudied – a nascent phenomenon likely most noticeable to those who work within college admissions offices and college access organizations.

In short, we know very little about how the institutions serving the vast majority of U.S. students may be working with other organizations to address issues of access and diversity. Focusing greater attention on less selective institutions is important because this group of HEIs serves as many as 93% of college students in the United States (Reardon et al., 2012) and yet remains understudied (Kezar, 2005), particularly with respect to the mechanisms they are employing to address issues of access and diversity.

**Purpose and Goals of the Study**

This study uses qualitative and quantitative analyses of available data from strategic planning documents, NCES datasets, and interviews and draws on case study methods to explore how less selective (“typical”) higher education institutions view and approach partnerships with nonprofit organizations in a changing demographic and economic context. As an exploratory, knowledge- and theory-building study, this research is intended to lay the foundation for future studies that focus on how relationships may be related to student outcomes such as enrollment, retention and graduation for different groups of students, we well as institutional outcomes like fiscal
sustainability. Before we can engage in a systematic program of research on the effects of these relationships, we need a study like this dissertation to learn more about the range and variation of relationships in the landscape of higher education, how they are distributed, what motivates their initiation and maintenance over time, how institutions evaluate the success of these relationships, and what kinds of higher education institutions undertake them.

Using quantitative methods, this study examines associations between institutions’ characteristics (e.g., selectivity, endowment size, religious affiliation, public/private status) and the existing population of low-income and minority students and how these characteristics may be related to the formation and maintenance of relationships. To understand how institutions think about the utility of these relationships and what they hope to accomplish with regard to access and diversity, this dissertation also examines the reasons that higher education institutions considered, established, and maintained relationships with nonprofits over time.

With this focus on motivation – that is, the antecedents to partnership formation (Oliver, 1990) – this study explores whether higher education institutions perceive relationships with NPOs as serving purposes other than increasing access and diversity. An exploration of the motivations to form and maintain ties to nonprofits also builds understanding of how higher education define and understand college access. How an HEI defines and understands the problem(s) it is facing – and whether the institution considers it a problem at all – is expected to influence the actions it chooses to take. If questions of diversity and access to college are seen as problems with clear definitions,
solutions and implementation – “technical” problems – HEIs are expected to take
different action than if they believe solutions require improved learning in order to
understand the problem or devise and implement solutions (“adaptive” problems)
(Heifetz, 1994). If a lack of diversity or access is understood as rooted in institutional
economics (e.g., tuition and aid policies), it will be approached differently than if it were
seen as related to institutional reputation, geography, or prevailing market forces. If a
problem whose solution is framed as a moral imperative may be attacked differently than
one whose solution is seen as an issue of survival. Thus, an exploration of the
motivations to form and maintain ties to nonprofits builds understanding of how higher
education institutions think about and construct college access.

Examining the motivations that less selective higher education institutions have to
form and maintain relationships with college-access organizations will improve
understanding of how these institutions are responding to the challenges presented by the
confluence of demography, enrollment, geographic shifts, and institutional finances.
While the external validity of a single exploratory study is limited, the findings from this
research identify themes that drive institutional decision-making – particularly among
institutions that serve the great majority of college students in the United States – in an
age characterized by a host of competing concerns.

**Contribution to Literature**

This study makes several contributions to literature. First, scant research has
explicated and described the linkages between higher education institutions and high
schools, particularly relationships that higher education institutions have with nonprofit
college access organizations. More specifically, no known studies have examined the relationships that less selective institutions have with NPOs that promise to promote college access and diversity.

A very limited body of research applies the well-developed theories of organizational and institutional studies to relationships that educational institutions have with nonprofits. Considering these relationships through lenses typically applied in business and management studies is particularly appropriate in light of research suggesting that nonprofit entities “integrate more and more business- and government-like characteristics” such as marketing, advertising, and recruiting business sponsors (Knutsen, 2012, p. 990). Applying these frameworks to an examination of the relationships higher education institutions develop with NPOs has potential to fruitfully refine and extend the utility of these theories.

The results of this study also have implications for practice. For HEIs, a refined understanding of the primary forces and concerns driving them (or their peer institutions) to form relationships may have potential to catalyze better relationships. For NPOs, improved understanding of HEIs’ motivations and aims may help NPOs better understand what their partners are trying to accomplish through relationships. This knowledge may not only help NPOs strategize more effectively about which HEIs to approach for relationships, but may also shape the services NPOs provide and data they collect. In essence, insights generated by this research may be used by HEIs and NPOs to enhance their collective value proposition as drivers of institutional diversity and access.
CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter lays the groundwork for this study by examining relevant literature on collaborations, partnerships and similar forms of inter-organizational relationships. This chapter begins by examining what collaborations and other forms of organizational relationships are. I then move on to examine the literature on how these relationships have been studied specifically within higher education and more broadly, particularly within business and nonprofit (non-education) settings. The following section examines prevailing perspectives on how and why relationships are formed and maintained. The final section considers what we do and do not know with regard to relationships in the context of higher education.

Defining Relationships Between Organizations

Many researchers have pointed out and discussed at length the various names and definitions that can and should be applied to a range of types of interactions between organizations. Some of the most commonly used terms include “collaboration” (e.g., Frey, Lohmeier, Lee & Tollefson, 2006; Kezar, 2005), “partnership” (Waddock 1998, as found in Googins & Rochlin, 2000, p. 130), or “interorganizational relationship (IOR)” (Galaskiewicz, 1985). Eckel and Hartley (2008), using “interorganizational relationship” and “alliance,” note that these collaborative forms may operate on a number of different dimensions, including mutual financial support, a centralized and formalized governance structure, and “the relative contribution of each partner in the development and production of a given good or service” (p. 614). Similar elements are outlined by Tsasis
in his empirical study of interorganizational relationships among Canadian nonprofits that work on issues related to HIV/AIDS. To this list of terms Siegel (2010) adds both “joint venturing” and “collective action,” pointing out that “the rather vague reference to working together includes a broad sweep of activities, variable degrees of formality, and both loose and tight coordination” (p. 49).

There are gradations among these terms, with collaboration among the looser concepts, “generally treated as meaning the cooperative way two or more entities work together toward a shared goal” (Frey et al., 2006), and partnership tending toward more formality. Kezar (2006) has argued that:

most comprehensive definitions of collaboration refer to stakeholder interests or to who is involved in the collaboration; describe common purpose and shared rules or norms; and note what is being pooled—financial capital, human resources, skills, or expertise. (p. 807)

Other researchers have argued that arrangements between entities do not rise to the level of partnership if they lack a degree of mutuality or if they do not aim to catalyze generative growth and change in partnering institutions through their interactions even as they aim to address an external issue or problem (Butcher, Bezzina, Moran, 2010).

Waddock’s (1998) definition of partnership is cited widely across the literature (e.g., Googins and Rochlin, 2000) and emphasizes that partnerships require “the commitment of resources—time and effort—by individuals from all partner organizations,” “active rather than passive involvement from all parties,” and finally, “a resource commitment that is more than merely monetary” (Waddock, 1998, as found in Googins & Rochlin, 2000, p. 130).
Parsing the concepts of partnership, collaboration, and alliance is difficult, making the constructs themselves somewhat challenging to evaluate, which many researchers have acknowledged (e.g., Gajda, 2004; Marek, Brock, & Savla, 2015). Marek et al. (2015) suggested that evaluation of coalitions (their word for collaborations and partnerships) is complicated by “a lack of empirically verified tools, undefined or unmeasurable community outcomes, the dynamic nature of coalitions, and the length of time typical for interventions to effect community outcomes” (p. 68). Nonetheless, numerous researchers have proposed frameworks that can be used to understand interactions between organizations, whatever name is applied. Taken as a whole, these frameworks emphasize that the real significance of relationships between organizations lies not in what they are called, but in their characteristics – mechanics, processes, results, internal and external aims – as well as the extent to which they accomplish their goal(s).

Googins and Rochlin (2000) suggest that all collaborations can be located on a continuum with three stages: reciprocal exchange, developmental value creation, and symbiotic value creation. Similarly, Austin (2000) suggests a three-stage “collaboration continuum,” which moves from philanthropic to transactional to integrative (p. 72). Others have suggested that three types of “engagement strategies” predominate in community engagement focused partnerships and that these lie along a continuum from “least to most involved” (Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, & Herremans, 2010, p. 303). The least involved strategy is referred to as transactional; it consists of activities such as one-way communication and financial donations and is characterized by low levels of interaction between cooperating organizations or institutions. The most involved strategy
is termed *transformational* and “moves beyond symbolic engagement activities and relies on authentic dialogue and critical reflectivity” (Bowen et al., 2010, p. 306). Other attributes of this kind of relationship include “listening and understanding, the creation of a shared organizational language…and a strong connection with moving beyond talk into action” (Bowen et al., p. 306). The *transitional* strategy, by contrast, exists between the two extremes, “is characterized by two-way communication, consultation and collaboration” and is transitional:

in the sense that firms [i.e., organizations] move beyond the one-way communication of transactional approaches to engage in dialogue with communities, but do not yet reach the shared sense-making and problem framing of transformational approaches. (Bowen et al., 2010, p. 306)

Applied specifically to partnerships between universities and schools, Butcher et al. (2011) have written that transactional partnerships are ones in which:

the parties are concerned with the achievement of their individual purposes through the exchange of appropriate considerations [and] in the process they are likely to remain fundamentally unchanged. A transformational partnership is one with a moral dimension (Starratt, 2004) in which the parties come together to pursue common purpose and create the possibility of generative growth and change through mutual interaction as they apply their resources to addressing complex problems. (p. 31)

Gajda (2004) extends this to a four-stage continuum that focuses on the extent of organizations’ integration by delineating the tasks, processes and practices that characterize each stage. Figure 1 depicts this model.
As in Bowen et al.'s (2010) three stage continuum, Frey et al. (2006) differentiate each of the seven stages of their model according to purpose, tasks and organizational strategies, leadership and decision-making, and by type and frequency of communication. Their model locates all IORs somewhere on a continuum between simple *coexistence*, through *communication, cooperation, coordination, coalition, collaboration* and, finally, *coadunation* (which means “having grown together”) (Frey et al., 2006, p. 385). Figure 2 illustrates this model.
Several conceptions of collaboration have been transformed into rubrics and tools for assessment that are helpful in understanding the important elements that together constitute collaboration. The Strategic Alliance Formative Assessment Rubric (SAFAR) is used “to gauge the relative health of…alliances that seek to capitalize on the power of collaboration” and rests on five guiding principles of collaboration theory: that collaboration “is an imperative…is known by many names…is a journey and not a destination…[that] the personal is as important as the procedural, and [that] collaboration develops in stages” (Gajda, 2004, p. 70-71). More recently, Marek et al. (2015) developed and tested the Collaboration Assessment Tool (CAT) which maps survey questions onto “seven factors identified as critical for effective collaboration: Context,
Members, Process and Organization, Communication, Function, Resources, and Leadership” (p. 69).

**Relationships Within Higher Education**

In the context of higher education, relationships between organizations are seen to be useful in a variety of capacities. In his empirical study of the *LEADership, Education and Development* (LEAD) Program, a collaboration among several HEIs that aims to diversify the pool of students entering the field of business, Siegel (2010) summarizes the main benefits to collaboration in this context. He writes that collaboration is good “for the social issue…[and] for the organizations or sectors involved” (pp. 57-59) and finally, that it is “good for system revitalization,” in which greater connections “chip away at the ‘sector polarization’ model that bears some of the responsibility for the creation and perpetuation of many social problems” (p. 60). Siegel (2010) presents a somewhat rosier picture of collaborations and their potential than many empirical studies have indicated to be the case, but his classification of the perceived benefits is a useful guide to what relationships between organizations may accomplish.

Higher education collaborations and partnerships have been studied in different ways, but these studies have not generally focused on institutional motivation to form relationships. More common is a focus on measuring or reconciling institutional cultures in the process of forming relationships (e.g., Eckel & Hartley, 2008; Kezar, 2010) or studying how institutions become more collaborative (e.g., Kezar, 2005). More common still is telling the story of how relationships between universities and another entity or entities evolved over time (e.g., Butcher, et al., 2010; Kezar, 2005).
Numerous partnership directors and administrators (e.g., Eckman, Noonan & Garth, 2004) and partnership advocates (e.g., Maurrasse, 2001; Millett & Nettles, 2009; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988) have conducted studies of the ties between higher education institutions and other entities, but there are several holes in our knowledge left unaddressed by existing studies, whether because of the research methods used, types of partnerships/collaborations studied, or the general tendency not to ground research on this topic in the established partnership theory.

First, the majority of the literature is limited to three types of relationships: university-school (e.g., Ravid & Handler, 2001; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988), university-community (e.g., Maurrasse, 2001), and university-industry partnerships (e.g., Etzkowitz, 2008). While university-community ties seem the closest analogue to the university-CBO/NPO relationship that forms the subject of this study, these are actually quite different relationships. Although a community-based organization (CBO) has defined boundaries, a community itself is much harder to define, since it may be comprised of potentially thousands of people and hundreds of organizations. Studies of partnerships between HEIs and NPOs are extremely limited in number and do not focus on motivations to form relationships. Rather, they aim to make visible the barriers to successful partnerships, in particular, organizational culture (Eckel & Hartley, 2008; Kezar, 2010).

Most studies related to college access have been of the activities, models, foci and effectiveness of access organizations themselves (e.g., Gándara & Bial, 2001; Perna Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, Thomas, & Li, 2008) or of colleges’ efforts to increase college
access (e.g., Kirst & Venezia, 2001). Partnerships between K-12 schools and universities specifically to address issues of college access have been studied fairly extensively, concluding in general that such relationships “show promise for helping educators address many intractable educational and social challenges that have confronted communities and student demographic groups” (Núñez & Olivia, 2009, p. 334). Relationships formed specifically between HEIs and NPOs to address issues of college access are a relatively new phenomenon, and as such are not well represented in the empirical literature.

Two important empirical studies of HEI-NPO partnership represent exceptions to the basic trend and contribute to our understanding of this area of inquiry. A recent study conducted of the partnership-based nonprofit QuestBridge (Furquim & Glasener, 2016) aimed to estimate the effect of participation in this partnership on increasing HEIs’ percentage of low-income students. The authors found that the partnership had no effect on increasing low-income students on campus. The researchers were not able to establish that the partnership served other, less visible, purposes. Yet their study brings up a critically important question: why an HEI would continue to participate in a partnership – which requires investments of time, money and other resources – if no results were obtained.

Another rare empirical exploration of the relationship between a university and a nonprofit aimed at addressing college access is that conducted by Kezar, Lester and Yang (2010). Their three-year case study of the role of culture in partnerships between CBOs and colleges suggests that, despite common interests across collaborating organizations,
the nonprofit partner may be essentially a disempowered or “unequal partner” and may have a fundamental misunderstanding of the ways in which higher education institutions function, particularly with regard to culture and structure (Kezar et al., 2010, p. 524). The authors do not specify their use of the term “disempowered,” but argue that disempowered status stems from two sources: the nonprofit’s comparatively lesser power and resources, and the fact that “the nonprofits are advocating for a disempowered group, [in this case the] lowest of the low income, which also may unconsciously be met with resistance” (Kezar et al., 2010, p. 522). The authors argue that issues of power affect the ability of partnerships to achieve their goals—in this case, to encourage low-income people to develop financial assets such as matched savings accounts and hone financial life skills—and suggest further research to understand how and why postsecondary institutions make choices regarding partners. Literature within the management field concurs, suggesting that “power inequalities” (Selsky & Parker, 2005, p. 867) may arise between entities engaged in explicitly social partnerships such those that address, for instance, “environmental protection, economic development, poverty alleviation, health care or education” (Vurro, Dacin, & Perrini, 2010, p. 39).

Motivations for forming partnerships have been less often studied in higher education contexts than in the fields of management. Siegel (2010) points this out, arguing that:

> there has been scant attention in the literature to reasons colleges and universities, in particular, join networks of other social actors to support a common cause. Despite the pervasiveness of partnership as an organizational form, coupled with a vast literature on interorganizational relationships and their determinants (Oliver, 1990), theories and empirical
research on the topic have virtually ignored the higher education sector as a participant in such networks. (p. 68)

Researchers rely on the general assumption – developed largely in the field of management – that partnerships have utility (Googins & Rochlin’s [2000] “ideology of partnership”) for all types of actors in all types of sectors. This is problematic because, as Kezar (2011) found in a study of a partnership between an HEI and a nonprofit focused on low-income students, despite both being categorized as nonprofits, higher education and NPOs have “cultural differences that may hamper…partnerships” (p. 232). In other words, we cannot subscribe to the notion that “there is enough similarity between nonprofits that distinctions will not affect the partnership process” (Kezar, 2011, p. 206).

Available research considers important elements of creating and maintaining specific partnerships (e.g., National Partnership for Educational Access, 2012) but generally “lacks the theory or empirical support that acknowledges the specific role of colleges and universities” (Siegel, 2010, p. 97). In a similar vein, much of the literature on educational partnerships takes the form of reflections and practical how-to guides (e.g., Maeroff, Callan, & Usdan, 2001; Ravid & Handler, 2001). Lumina Foundation (Eckman et al., 2004), for instance, sponsored a publication in which 15 university presidents emphasized the role collaboration played in each institution’s efforts to recruit and foster the success of low-income students. Though it made for interesting reading, these were narratives, not studies, and while they made useful suggestions for administrative practitioners, they had little in the way of theoretical grounding.
Perspectives on How and Why Relationships Form and Are Maintained

Literature on partnerships from both management (e.g., Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Seitanidi, Koufopoulos, & Palmer, 2010; Selsky & Parker, 2005; Vurro et al., 2010) and non-management fields (e.g., Gajda, 2007; Gajda & Koliba, 2004; Siegel, 2010) suggests that working together is perceived to produce greater value for partners than working alone; this is particularly true when aims are related to social issues and causes (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Some researchers argue that much of the strength of partnership is rooted in the ability of actors from different sectors to “focus on the same issue…[but] to think about it differently, be motivated by different goals and employ different approaches” and thus produce “new learnings” (Selsky & Parker, 2005, p. 21). Others have suggested that collaborating leads to change “by addressing the shortcoming of corporate policies and programmes” (Seitanidi et al., 2010, p. 139) and may help firms “foresee dynamics of change and potentially risky challenges in the market and shifts in community expectations” (Vurro et al., 2010, p. 48).

Formation. Research in organizational theory illustrates that relationship formation between organizations is generally driven by necessity, asymmetry, reciprocity, stability, legitimacy, and efficiency; these are what Oliver (1990) collectively referred to as the “Six Critical Contingencies.” Developed through a review of thirty years of empirical studies of corporate IORs, this framework has potential to retain its strong explanatory power when applied to relations between nonprofits, as in this study. Previous studies of the formation of IORs tended to emphasize only one of these six
aspects or suggest that they operated singly, rather than in tandem. The enduring importance of Oliver’s (1990) argument—and the reason the framework is still frequently cited—is her emphasis that, “although each determinant is a separate and sufficient cause of relationship formation, these contingencies may interact or occur concurrently when the organization decides to establish an IOR” (italics added) (p. 242). Table 1 lists these contingencies.

### Table 1

**Determinants of Interorganizational Relationships (IORs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determinant</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Necessity</strong></td>
<td>Necessity refers to “mandated relations” (p. 243) that spring from industry or professional regulatory requirements, such as the requirement that a chemicals manufacturing company interact with the Occupational Health and Safety Organization (OSHA), the federal organization tasked with the protection of workers.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Asymmetry</strong></td>
<td>The contingency of asymmetry is grounded in the need for one organization to exert power over another, but it assumes that “relationship formation necessitates the loss of decision-making latitude and discretion” (Oliver, 1990, p. 244).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reciprocity</strong></td>
<td>Reciprocity emphasizes “cooperation, collaboration, and coordination between organizations, rather than domination, power and control” (Oliver, 1990, p. 244) and explains that relationships between organizations arise so that organizations may pursue mutually beneficial goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stability</strong></td>
<td>As a motivation to form relationships, stability is related to organizations’ perceptions of uncertainty in their environment and their desire to “achieve stability, predictability, and dependability,” particularly with regard to resources needed for their ongoing operation (Oliver, 1990, p. 246).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legitimacy</strong></td>
<td>Establishing relationships to increase legitimacy “can originate from an organization’s motives to demonstrate or improve its reputation, image, prestige, or congruence with prevailing norms in its institutional environment” (Oliver, 1990, p. 246).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency</strong></td>
<td>Efficiency is the most cited explanation of the motivations to form external relationships, and relates to an organization’s “attempt to improve its internal input/output ratio” (Oliver, 1990, p. 245).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

March (1991), writing from the vantage point of organizational learning has also suggested that IORs may be a means to enhance an institution’s ability to engage in the “exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties” (p. 71). In other words, they are a mechanism to permit organizational learning (March, 1991, p. 71). March (1991) goes on to explain that exploration usually refers to actions such as “search, variation, risk-taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, [and] innovation,” while exploitation is associated with “refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, [and] execution” (p. 71). Table 2 illustrates these concepts.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Learning</th>
<th>Learning is the “exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties” (March, 1991, p. 71).</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation</td>
<td>is associated with “refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, [and] execution” (p. 71). “Using the information currently available to improve present returns (which suggests concentrating the investment on the apparently best alternative)” (p. 72).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Exploration usually refers to actions such as “search, variation, risk-taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, [and] innovation” (p. 71). “Gaining new information about alternatives and to improve future returns (which suggests allocating part of the investment to searching among uncertain alternatives).”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


March (1991) further argues that, for organizations to survive and succeed, it is critical for them to strike a balance between exploitation and exploration, and between improving an existing technology and developing a new one.
**Maintenance.** The maintenance of a particular partnership is assumed to depend on its continued utility in providing a benefit or benefits that are mutually satisfactory to both partner organizations. The efficiency contingency of organizational theory (Oliver, 1990; Williamson & Winter, 1991), for instance, suggests that the maintenance of a particular partnership depends on its continued ability to complete transactions more cheaply (efficiently) than they could be conducted in the marketplace. Similarly, relationships initiated for reasons of legitimacy (Oliver, 1990) will need to prove, on a continual basis, their ability to sustain or enhance legitimacy. The same is expected to be true for any of the antecedent contingencies or for organizational learning (March, 1991).

Literature on relationships suggests that maintaining them over time may be a flexible endeavor that depends more on finding the right contingency to justify the partnership at a particular moment, rather than justifying a partnership in particular way. In other words, in its early stages, a collaborative relationship between entities may initially represent an opportunity to accomplish a goal efficiently, whereas over time it may become a relationship wherein organizational learning overshadows efficiency as the primary purpose. This logic follows from Oliver’s (1990) argument that several contingencies may interact at the same time to initiate a relationship, and that within the context of one relationship the contingencies may also shift in relative importance over time.

**Characteristics of Interorganizational Relationships**

Researchers have long attempted to understand organizational relationships, including what they are comprised of as well as what they can accomplish. Most agree,
however, that relationships between entities do not have an on/off switch; rather, they exist along a dynamic continuum. Googins and Rochlin (2000) suggest that all collaborations can be located on a continuum with three stages: reciprocal exchange, developmental value creation, and symbiotic value creation. Others have suggested that three types of “engagement strategies” predominate in community engagement focused partnerships and that these lie along a continuum from “least to most involved” (Bowen et al., 2010, p. 303). The least involved strategy is referred to as *transactional*; it consists of activities such as one-way communication and financial donations and is characterized by low levels of interaction between cooperating organizations or institutions. The most involved strategy is termed *transformational* and “moves beyond symbolic engagement activities and relies on authentic dialogue and critical reflectivity” (Bowen et al., 2010, p. 306). Other attributes of this kind of relationship include “listening and understanding, the creation of a shared organizational language…and a strong connection with moving beyond talk into action” (Bowen et al., p. 306). The *transitional* strategy, by contrast, exists between the two extremes, “is characterized by two-way communication, consultation and collaboration” and is transitional in the sense that firms [i.e., organizations] move beyond the one-way communication of transactional approaches to engage in dialogue with communities, but do not yet reach the shared sense-making and problem framing of transformational approaches. (Bowen et al., 2010, p. 306)

As in Bowen et al.’s (2010) three stage continuum, Frey et al. (2006) differentiate each of the seven stages of their model according to purpose, tasks and organizational strategies, leadership and decision-making, and by type and frequency of communication. Their model locates all IORs somewhere on a continuum between simple *coexistence*,
through *communication, cooperation, coordination, coalition, collaboration* and, finally, *coadunation* (which means “having grown together”) (Frey et al., 2006, p. 385).

Several conceptions of collaboration have been transformed into rubrics and tools for assessment. The Strategic Alliance Formative Assessment Rubric (SAFAR) is used “to gauge the relative health of...alliances that seek to capitalize on the power of collaboration” and rests on five guiding principles of collaboration theory: that collaboration “is an imperative...is known by many names...is a journey and not a destination...[that] the personal is as important as the procedural, and [that] collaboration develops in stages” (Gajda, 2004, p. 70-71). More recently, Marek, Brock, and Savla, (2015) developed and tested the Collaboration Assessment Tool (CAT) which maps survey questions onto “seven factors identified as critical for effective collaboration: Context, Members, Process and Organization, Communication, Function, Resources, and Leadership” (p. 69). With few exceptions (e.g., Roberts & Bradley, 1991, in Parker & Selsky, 2004, p. 460; Waddock, 1988, in Seitanidi & Crane, 2009), partnerships between entities – whether educational or otherwise – are understood to be dynamic and evolving in nature and to exist somewhere along a continuum from least to most formalized (e.g., Bowen et al., 2010; Frey, Lohmeier, Lee, & Tollefson, 2006).

There is agreement among researchers as to the inherent dynamism of relationships, their utility, and some of their most important elements, yet defining the concepts of partnership, collaboration, and alliance (etc.) is difficult. Definitional challenges have made the constructs themselves somewhat challenging to evaluate (Gajda, 2004; Marek et al., 2015). Marek et al. (2015) suggested that evaluation of
coalitions (their word for collaborations and partnerships) is complicated by “a lack of empirically verified tools, undefined or un-measurable community outcomes, the dynamic nature of coalitions, and the length of time typical for interventions to effect community outcomes” (p. 68).

Without fully resolving the difficulty of defining and evaluating IORs, researchers have attempted to understand whether the formality of relationships is associated with any other organizational characteristics, or with particular subsectors of the nonprofit field, or whether pairings of certain organizational types are associated with success in a given context. In a statistical analysis of factors associated with the extent of formality of collaborative activities among nonprofits in Los Angeles, Guo and Acar (2005) found that the nonprofits more likely to develop more formalized collaborations were receiving government funding (but relied on fewer government funding streams) and were also older organizations with bigger budgets. These organizations also had larger numbers of board linkages with other nonprofits. Following this logic, we might reasonably expect colleges and universities with more formalized partnerships to exhibit institutional characteristics such as being state-funded, and having a relatively larger budget and endowment than other institutions. Nonetheless, Guo and Acar (2005) found more formal collaborations among organizations “outside the education, research, and social services industries” (p. 356). The authors offer no rationale for this particular finding, suggesting that partnerships among educational nonprofit organizations are under-explored.

Research on public-public and public-private partnerships in the UK found the former were associated with effectiveness, efficiency, and equity in the delivery of
services in “education, social care, regulatory services, housing, and welfare benefits” (Andrews & Entwistle, 2010, p. 685). Public-private partnerships were negatively associated with both effectiveness and equity in these same areas; public-nonprofit partnerships, by contrast, were “unrelated to performance” (Andrews & Entwistle, 2010, p. 679). These findings suggest that some fundamental nuances remain unexplored in the general assertion that partnerships are effective, and in particular that further research must include efforts to understand how cooperating organizations mutually define effectiveness in order to study the conditions under which effectiveness is achieved.

Despite difficulty in clearly defining IORs and unevenness with respect to evidence of their effectiveness and efficiency, the strategy of creating relationships has captured the attention of many organizations interested in maximizing efficiency and impact. Some educational scholars have referred to this as an “engagement imperative” (Siegel, 2010, p. 29). Those from business and management have called it “the ideology of cross-sector partnerships” (Googins & Rochlin, 2000, p. 128).

**Frameworks for relationships between nonprofits.** Few frameworks apply specifically to relationships between nonprofits and empirical studies examining partnerships between nonprofits are uncommon. In a rare qualitative study of collaboration among several nonprofits, Tsasis (2009) found that three themes influenced collaboration: values and complementary goals, shared vision, and interests; domain consensus (that is, the set of expectations around what an organization will and will not do); and social interactions and interpersonal relationships. Tsasis’ (2009) themes do not include resources or leadership, both of which are mentioned by Marek et al. (2015),
suggesting that organizations’ statuses as nonprofit influence the themes that, in turn, influence collaboration.

Recent scholarship originating from studies of the nonprofit sector has suggested that the lack of research on nonprofit partnerships may stem from the fact that “NPOs [nonprofit organizations] are becoming less distinctive because they integrate more and more business- and government-like characteristics” such as marketing, advertising, and recruiting business sponsors (Knutsen, 2012, p. 990). This hypothesis is akin to what management scholars have referred to as “intersectoral blurring” (Selsky & Parker, 2005, p. 853). However, other researchers focused on nonprofits suggest that the dearth of discussion of relationships between nonprofits may reflect a general tendency to overlook differences between within-sector and cross-sector relationships (Guo & Acar, 2005). In a related vein, Kezar (2011) suggests that interactions between colleges and NPOs in the context of a shared college access project may go unstudied due to “an assumption of similarity” when it comes to culture and values (p. 210).

Partnerships between corporations and nonprofits seem unlikely to exhibit all the same characteristics as those exclusively between nonprofits, even if the goals of both partnerships are ostensibly socially oriented (Selsky & Parker, 2005). The few studies focused on nonprofit-nonprofit relationships (e.g., Tsasis, 2009; Kezar, 2011; Kezar et al., 2010) suggest that the nonprofit status of collaborating partners has an influence on both the kinds of value that can be engendered through partnership, as well as the kinds of assets that can be exchanged. Kezar et al. (2010) have argued there is a dearth of research on the influence of the characteristics and cultures of collaborating organizations.
on partnerships between different types of nonprofits (that is, within-sector collaborations).

That partnerships proceed in a linear, step-wise fashion appears to be a widely held assumption in the literature. What is less frequently considered or studied is whether partnerships may move both “forward” and “backward” in the continua between coexistence and coadunation (Frey et al., 2006) or, alternatively, among the transactional, transitional and transformational stations (Bowen et al., 2010). Together, these frameworks are instructive as a general guide to the important factors to consider in exploring a new kind of relationship.

What Do We Know and What Do We Not Know?

This review of prior research suggests that there are many names used to signify relationships between entities. These names signify different levels of closeness between entities, different aims, and different time horizons. Across sectors, collaborations and relationships are viewed as dynamic (e.g., Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b) and growing in popularity (e.g., Selsky & Parker, 2005). There is also agreement that the field of study is rife with competing definitions that deny both clarity and finality (Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Selsky & Parker, 2005).

Researchers regard IORs as a mechanism to create value for organizations, whether in education (e.g., Barnett et al., 2012; Ekman et al., 2004; Hooker & Brand, 2008; Kezar, 2005; Siegel, 2010) or business (e.g., Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Seitanidi et al., 2010; Vurro et al., 2010). Belief in the value-creating power of IORs is widespread among practitioners and researchers alike, even if the motivations for forming
and sustaining them are not always clearly defined and even when issues of power and cultural misunderstanding may be barriers to realizing goals (e.g., Kezar et al., 2010).

With some notable exceptions (see Eckel & Hartley [2008], on reconciling academic cultures in cross-university partnerships, as well as Kezar, 2005; Kezar et al., 2010; and Furquim & Glasener, 2016), the practice orientation of most writing about educational partnerships ignores the motivations driving the formation and maintenance of these relationships and neglects to address the theoretical underpinnings of collaboration. Much of the writing on educational partnerships takes the form of reflection (e.g., Maeroff et al., 2001), or a step-by-step guide (e.g., Ravid & Handler, 2001), presented as case study (e.g., Maurrasse, 2001). Yet, as Siegel (2010) has pointed out, most lack the rigor and degree of systematicness prescribed by case study methodology (Yin, 2009).

Finally, most research has not centered on, or even included, the higher education sector. If it has, it has treated higher education as indistinguishable from all other nonprofit sector entities. A review of literature indicates that few studies of relationships between nonprofits have been undertaken (Kezar et al., 2010 and Tsasis, 2009 are exceptions) and that an organizational perspective on collaborations in education contexts is more rare still (Kezar et al., 2010 and Furquim & Glasener, 2016 are exceptions). Few researchers have considered how the characteristics of organizations within a single sector may influence their attempts at partnership (Kezar et al., 2010 is again an exception). Only one known study – Furquim and Glasener (2016) has offered an empirically grounded study of factors that motivate HEIs to enter into relationships with
nonprofit organizations. As a purely quantitative study, however, it offers a distinct perspective on interorganizational relationships, one focused on results and effectiveness. In sum, there is little work that builds a conceptual or empirical bridge to inform understanding of the relationships between colleges and college access organizations, in particular what motivates their formation and maintenance.

This study draws from multiple theoretical perspectives to situate the forming of relationships as an organizational choice that conforms to the known antecedents – the motivating factors – of partnership formation. These antecedents include necessity, asymmetry, reciprocity, stability, legitimacy, and efficiency (Oliver, 1990), as well as the need for organizations to learn from one another in order to improve or to create new value (March, 1991). Oliver (1990) and March (1991) suggest that organizations have a set of reasons for forming and maintaining relationships, but that these reasons may be mutable. Both suggest that the reasons elucidated are not necessarily exclusive of one another, and that at various points in time they may work in concert, exist in hierarchy, or modify one another. Economists Coase (1937) and Williamson and Winter (1991), writing under the banner of efficiency, make the essential argument that if it is more efficient for an entity to do a thing or perform a function itself, rather than to outsource it, then the entity will do it itself. The reverse is also true. This is an intuitively sensible notion, but it begs the question of what efficiency means and where the threshold is for something to be “efficient” versus “not efficient.” Exploring the many meanings of efficiency in the context of college admissions is certainly among the more important aims of this research.
Drawing on the continua established by Frey et al. (2006) and Bowen et al. (2010) and integrating these stages with Marek et al.’s (2015) framework, this study posits that collaborations may be differentiated a variety of factors, including purpose, tasks and the organizational strategies used, leadership and decision-making, and type and frequency of communication, as well as by context, resources, and communication. This study’s conceptual framework also posits that institutional characteristics may have a relationship to why particular kinds of institutions engage in and maintain relationships with nonprofits. In particular, the conceptual model predicts that institutions’ decisions to engage in collaborations for college access are related to attributes such as the percentage of enrolled low-income and minority students; whether an institution is religiously affiliated; size of endowment, public/private institution status, and institutional selectivity.
CHAPTER 3

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods research design that integrated available quantitative data with interviews, documentation and observations to build understanding of the relationships that HEIs have with external college-access oriented organizations. This combination of research methods was selected with the goal of shedding light on the following interrelated questions research questions:

I. Are there relationships between institutional characteristics (e.g., selectivity, endowment size, religious affiliation, public/private status) and the representation of low-income and minority students at these institutions?

II. What organizations do HEIs understand to be “college access nonprofits” and how do HEIs understand relationships with these entities?

III. What motivates HEIs to initially engage in relationships with college access nonprofits? What motivates them to sustain these relationships? How are relationships initiated?

Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Data

In the initial phases of the study, qualitative data were generated through interviews, observations, documentation, and readily available, Web-based institutional data such as strategic plans, university/college websites, online publications such as alumni magazines and student newspapers. Quantitative data on institutions were obtained simultaneously by downloading available datasets from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) via their Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Quantitative and qualitative data were not generated independently of one another. Quantitative datasets were continuously built out using information gleaned through interviews and using endowment data obtained from the Council for Aid to
Education (CAE), and initial forays into the quantitative data guided the qualitative inquiry portion of this study.

Descriptive and multivariate analyses were used to address the first research question, which pertains to relationships between institutional characteristics and representation of URMs and Pell recipients. The information gleaned from these analyses provides contextual information for the qualitative inquiry. In the qualitative portion of the study I used phone conversations and email exchanges with university administrators, coupled with observations and available online information such as institutional strategic plans and university press articles, to answer the second two questions, which pertain to institutions’ motivations to engage in and sustain relationships with nonprofits, as well as the goals they are attempting to achieve.

Setting

This study focused on four-year public and private nonprofit colleges and universities that serve undergraduate students and are located in Pennsylvania. In an effort to minimize confirmation bias, I made an explicit choice to conduct my research at institutions very different from those at which I had worked. My direct experience is limited to highly selective admissions, where both applicants’ and admitted students’ tests scores and academic achievement are almost uniformly very high. These institutions’ large endowments permit them to offer generous financial aid packages, and with strong brand recognition they have an abundance of applicants and few available spots. The less selective institutions that comprise my sample not only contend with a
different set of constraints on their behavior, but also have been studied far less frequently than their highly selective counterparts.

I excluded community colleges and for-profit institutions because, with their open enrollment policies, these sectors already serve high percentages of low-income and minority students (Kena et al., 2014). Two-year colleges are engaged in a dense web of relationships to promote college access, including social services agencies, CBOs, nonprofits, alternative high schools, and local employers (e.g., Workforce Strategy Center, 2002; Fitzgerald & Jenkins, 1997; Gruber, 2004). Given their open enrollment policies, two-year colleges are more focused on forging relationships that aim to increase students’ success than access (e.g., Workforce Strategy Center, 2002; Fitzgerald & Jenkins, 1997; Gruber, 2004). Moreover, many college access organizations focus on promoting enrollment at four-year institutions as opposed to two-year institutions (e.g., Furquim & Glasener, 2016; Gándara & Bial, 2001).

Pennsylvania was a strategic choice for this setting of this study because the state encompasses a large number of four-year educational institutions, and because these institutions demonstrate range and variation with regard to such institutional characteristics as selectivity, religious affiliation, size, cost of attendance, public/private status, geography, and endowment size. The state’s institutions include women’s colleges, HBCUs, art colleges, and seminaries. As such, the sample for this study includes institutions with diverse characteristics.
Validity

Like all states, the state of Pennsylvania has its own unique system of higher education. As such, the external validity of the study is limited. One particularly unique characteristic of the state is the presence of a well-developed network of college access organizations across the state. In the Greater Philadelphia Region, many of these access organizations are linked through the Philadelphia College Prep Roundtable (PCPR), an organization that provides networking and professional development to nonprofit college access organizations and strives to forge linkages between individuals as well as organizations. Nonetheless, this is a theory-building study. As such, learning whether higher education institutions tend to partner with local organizations and/or national organizations improves understanding of the underlying phenomenon. Furthermore, PCPR members do not work solely with institutions in close geographic proximity; many may focus on working with individuals rather than with institutions; and many members are institutions outside the scope of this study (e.g., community colleges or for-profit institutions).

Role of the Researcher

The inspiration and framing of this study were heavily influenced by my nine years as a college admissions officer and the knowledge afforded me by this professional practice, most importantly my experience as the first coordinator of a four-year university’s relationship with a college access-oriented nonprofit that specialized in working with low-income students. While it was clear on the nonprofit’s website who their other partner institutions were, and that the number was growing each year, I
wondered how the relationships had come to be and what their relationships were like with other colleges and universities. This study represented an opportunity to explore relationships for college access that occur across institutions and organizations and to build understanding of higher education contexts that are dissimilar to those with which I have direct personal experience.

This study’s research questions were at attempt to frame relevant inquiries that could begin to give shape to what appears to be a growing body of cross-organizational relationships built around college access in the United States. As a researcher hoping to study relationships that cross boundaries between nonprofits and college admissions offices, I possess the unique advantage of having existing contacts and relationships located in both entities. I speak the languages of both college admissions and college access, having straddled these two areas while working in admissions. Years of admissions work have helped me develop the skills that are markers of a “good qualitative researcher-as-instrument,” namely:

- familiarity with the phenomenon and setting under study; a multidisciplinary approach…;
- good investigative skills, the ability to draw people out, and meticulous attention to detail; being nonjudgmental with participants…;
- and a heightened sense of empathetic engagement, balanced with a heightened sense of objective awareness. (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 42)

While my professional experiences were in some respects an advantage with regard to gaining access to participants and sites, as well as earning trust, these experiences may have also disadvantaged me in the collection and analysis of data, even without my direct knowledge. As Maxwell (2013) notes, “recognizing your personal ties to the study you want to conduct can provide you with a valuable source of insight,
theory, and data about the phenomena you are studying” even as it may be a hindrance in other ways (p. 27). As much as possible I guarded against making inferences when speaking with individuals with whom I shared a common admissions “language,” being particularly careful to ask for clarification of terms, constructs, beliefs, and practices I (or they) believed I understood. I was also careful not to conflate my own experience with that of participants, being sure that all assertions and assumptions were generated from data, rather than from my attempts to fill in holes with my own knowledge. My own experiences should not be discounted, but must be carefully measured against the more immediate impressions and current experiences of study participants.

Quantitative Methods

The quantitative portion of this study began with downloading the appropriate available information the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), an electronic database managed by the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES), which is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education. I used IPEDS to generate two data sets: one for the percentage of Pell recipients at each institution over time, and the other for percentage of URMs over time. The study’s methods also called for me to recursively enhance each data set with the addition of information derived from other sources. These sources included data on institutional endowment from the Council for Aid to Education (CAE) and, after completion of the qualitative portion of the study, the names of the NPOs mentioned by representatives of each of the institutions with which I had direct contact.
Population and sample. For the quantitative portion of this study, the population and sample of interest were nonprofit, four-year colleges and universities in the state of Pennsylvania. To identify the population and determine the sample, I performed a search using IPEDS for Title IV participating, public and private nonprofit 4-year institutions in Pennsylvania that grant degrees, serve first-time full-time undergraduates, and do not offer their educational program completely via distance. These criteria generated a list of 125 institutions; this includes all 19 branches of Penn State and the four University of Pittsburgh campuses, since IPEDS reports these as individual institutions.

I excluded 13 institutions from the population, on the basis of their 2015 Basic Carnegie classification: Special Focus Four-Year: Faith-Related Institutions; Special Focus Four-Year: Other Health Professions Schools or Special Focus Four-Year: Arts, Music & Design Schools. The institutions, as a result of their special focus, were not only likely to be outliers with respect to both populations served and subjects offered, but were also likely to engage in specialized recruitment practices. Since the motivation to engage in particular recruitment practices (i.e., engagement with nonprofits that focus on college access) is at the core of the questions that undergird this study, I sought to build a sample with the greatest likelihood of finding similar practices across institutions. The sample for this study consists of the 113 public and private nonprofit, four-year institutions in Pennsylvania that serve undergraduate students and are not narrowly focused on technical, art, or religious education. Table 3 shows the characteristics of the 113 HEIs that comprise the sample for this study. Of the 113 institutions, 72 are private nonprofits.
and 41 are public; 65 are not affiliated with any religion, while 48 HEIs are rooted in a religious tradition.

Table 3  
*General Characteristics of PA 4-Year Colleges and Universities (sample)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nonreligious</th>
<th>Religiously affiliated</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private nonprofit</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly selective</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately selective</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No available data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly selective</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately selective</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No available data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data collection.** My understanding of the phenomenon of HEI-NPO relationships assumes that an HEI’s characteristics – in particular religious affiliation, endowment size, public/private status (“institutional control”), selectivity, level of urbanity, and percentage of Pell grant recipients and URM students – are related to the institution’s stance toward nonprofit relationships. With the exception of endowment size and selectivity, these data are readily available for download through National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database. I downloaded one dataset for Pell grant recipients and one for underrepresented minority (URM) students. Information on Pell recipients was available from 1999-2014. Information pertaining to percentages of non-white students at the institutions in this study was available from 1994-2014, but listed Black, Asian, Latinx, Native American
and multiracial/multiethnic students each as separate groups. My research questions pertained to URMs as a group, so I therefore replaced the individual race and ethnicity columns in my master URM dataset with a new column entitled “percentage URM.” This column simply represented a derivation: the aggregate of the Black, Latinx, Native and multiracial/multiethnic percentages for each year of available data.

The conceptual framework underpinning this study, as well as the analysis, called for me to locate, generate, and derive additional information pertaining to endowment size and institutional selectivity as well as the number of relationships managed by an HEI and the type of organizations with which HEIs have relationships. The first two of these additional data sources were represented in the Pell and URM datasets through the addition of new columns; the second two required the construction of a new dataset.

**Endowment size.** To determine the most recent endowment size for each of the 113 Pennsylvania institutions in my study, I contacted the Council for Aid to Education (CAE), and a representative graciously shared these data for FY2015. (CAE is a subsidiary of the nonprofit research organization, the RAND Corporation, which has conducted surveys of private giving to higher education for over 50 years.) I was unable to secure these data for prior years, despite several attempts. These data (FY2015) were added into both the Pell and URM datasets through the use of an additional column, entitled “endowment.”

**Institutional selectivity and test-optional policies.** My research questions also required me to derive a column indicating institutional selectivity. I used the most recent year of available data (2014) for each of the institutions and used the same formula
NCES employs for the Integrated of Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which is in turn based on the 2005 Carnegie Classification of Institutions. The “inclusive,” “moderately selective,” and “highly selective” categories correspond to 25th percentile ACT-equivalent scores of students who were accepted to the institution. The score ranges for the three categories are: less than 18, between 18 and 21, and greater than 21 points, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). These data are available from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) starting in the year 2001. These data were added into the Pell and URM datasets through the use of an additional column, entitled “institutional selectivity.”

In recent years, an increasing number of institutions have moved to a test-optional admissions policy or have chosen not to submit these data to NCES, making it impossible to derive institutional selectivity (as was, no doubt, their aim). As of January 2017 there were 954 institutions in the United States of a variety of kinds – from online to brick-and-mortar, art-focused to technology-focused – with some form of a test-optional policy, according to FairTest.org (The National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2017). Forty-six (5% of all test-optional institutions) were located in Pennsylvania. Thirty-two of these institutions were part of this study’s sample of 113 HEIs; therefore roughly 28% of the quantitative sample was comprised of test-optional institutions. Of the 25 institutions in the qualitative portion of this study, FairTest.org listed 11 (44%) of them as having a test-optional admissions policy. In these cases, I used the most recent testing data available to classify institutions’ selectivity level. For instance, for an institution that moved to a test-optional policy in 2011, I used the testing data for 2010 to impute the selectivity level.
For institutions where only SAT data were available, I used concordance tables available on the Internet to convert SAT scores to ACT scores and then determined the selectivity level, again using the NCES formula (The College Board, 2005). Four institutions have either never reported ACT or SAT results to NCES or never required such tests as a prerequisite to applying.

The four institutions without available data that could be used to derive selectivity represented a wide variety of specialized higher education offerings: two were private nonprofit institutions and two were public; one had a history as an adult-focused undergraduate institution, two were science and technology-focused, and one was the state’s only public HBCU. Two of these HEIs were included in my qualitative sample.

**Relationship dataset.** I constructed an additional dataset including only the 25 institutions in the qualitative portion of the study. These data include the number of college access organizations mentioned in conversation with an HEI, and the type of organization they represented (e.g., for profit, school, association, etc.), as well as the nonprofits’ names and websites, and whether they provided direct services to students such as tutoring, financial aid counseling and assistance, skill development, or other college-related supports.

**Data analysis.** Data gleaned from IPEDS and built up through the qualitative portion of the study were used to answer the research question concerned with the basic distribution of relationships across higher education institutions in Pennsylvania as well as to begin to understand whether institutional characteristics were related to percentages of enrolled URM or Pell students over time. I conducted paired sample t-tests to
determine whether the percentages of Pell grant recipients and URM students had changed significantly over time at Pennsylvania HEIs and whether the year-over-year changes were significant. For both Pell and URM datasets, I performed one-way ANOVAs to determine whether there were significant differences over time between the group of institutions where I conducted interviews and those where I did not. I chose ANOVAs as opposed to t-tests due to the interest in observing differences between the groups over time. Additional ANOVAs were used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in percentages of Pell or URM students over time by selectivity, religious affiliation, control of institution, level of institutional urbanity, and institutional size. In cases when ANOVAs indicated significant differences among groups, Tukey’s post-hoc tests were performed to determine which groups were varying. Due to the small sample size of HEIs for which I was able to generate data on relationships, I was unable to generate a regression model that would predict whether the institutional characteristics included here had power to predict whether an institution would have relationships with nonprofits. However, when coupled to qualitative analyses, these tests had power to inform our burgeoning understanding of the relationships between institutional characteristics.

**Qualitative Methods**

The qualitative portion of this study sought to understand why HEIs would form and maintain relationships with NPOs when the percentages of URMs and low-income students appears to be on the rise for all institutions in the state, regardless of whether they maintain relationships. An alternative way of asking this question is to consider why
HEIs form or maintain relationships despite the fact that there is little evidence that they make a difference. Formulating a question in this way could rightly be seen as more confrontational – even reporter-like – than a researcher should be. Instead, I sought to understand what might be termed the preliminary reasoning – the antecedents (Oliver, 1990) – to entering into relationships by asking foundational question such as what the institution’s goals were with regard to college access, whether the institution kept records of students who were affiliated with nonprofits, and whether the HEI sought out relationships or was approached by NPOs.

The qualitative portion of this study focused on generating data through hour-long semi-structured interviews with admissions representatives from study HEIs. These data were then considered in concert with web-based available information such as strategic plans, popular press, student publications, and alumni and official institutional publications on the HEIs where I was able to conduct interviews. The aim of this portion of the study was to elicit a finer-grain of information regarding relationships than was available through statistical analyses alone.

**Sample.** The sample in the qualitative portion of the study was comprised of four-year public and private nonprofit higher education institutions in Pennsylvania that have relationships with nongovernmental, nonprofit college access organizations. The study sample was selected by contacting the most appropriate staff member at the admissions office at as many of the 113 HEIs in the overall population as possible; the final sample was 25 HEIs. To determine the most appropriate staff member I began with the admissions office website and searched for someone with a title related to recruitment of
multicultural populations. If I could find no one with a title that directly referenced an access orientation, I sought the Director of the office, who is typically responsible for managing the day-to-day internal workings of the office. I made this choice for two reasons. First, the Director often personally knows a great deal about any office-wide initiatives such as recruitment of diverse populations. Second, I assumed that if this were not the case, she or he would be able to direct me to the most knowledgeable person.

**Contacting participants.** Beginning in June 2015 I used simple Web searches to assemble an Excel spreadsheet of the relevant names, titles, and contact information (phone and email) of admissions personnel at all the institutions in my sample. I included columns to indicate the date(s) I emailed and/or called them, whether they replied, date of initial interview, date of receipt of a signed consent form, and a column for general notes. In the case of the two institutions in Pennsylvania with a total of 22 branch campuses, I focused on representatives at the main campus. In effect, this reduced the initial number of institutions I had to contact from 113 to 91. In July 2015 I sent a form email (see Appendix A) to at least one person in each of the admissions offices for which I could find contact information requesting the individual’s participation in my study. In an attempt to respect the very heavy workloads many admissions offices experience between August and May as they are traveling to recruit, reading admissions files, and trying to yield a class, I restricted my contact with them to late May, June, July and early August. I prioritized those institutions classified as moderately selective and inclusive.

I was able to find a name and email address online for individuals representing 52 institutions. I contacted these people via email and heard back from 14; eight agreed to
provide information via an interview or some form of usable response. For the 34 institutions that did not reply within 7-10 days, I wrote again with a shorter message (see Appendix A for both emails). Twenty-nine institutions ignored my first and second emails, but four of these later made it into the sample through alternative means, primarily through asking for introductions to representatives of these institutions via shared personal connections at Penn GSE.

For those institutions that I did not respond after the second email, I then phoned to ask if they would be interested in participating. Whenever possible I called the direct phone line of the person I hoped to reach. While I had initially reached out with an email describing both my research interests and background in admissions, this clearly did not produce high response rates. In the event that it was the length of the email that was suppressing my response rate, I made an effort to shorten my “pitch” to potential participants, which took place largely over voicemail. In case it was not the length of the pitch that was suppressing the response rate, but rather apprehension around being researched, I began introducing myself as a former admissions officer who had a few questions about recruitment; I left off the research portion. If I had to leave a message, as was often the case, I learned to leave as little information as possible: a name and a number and a brief mention of my background in admissions and where I had worked. This was a calculated choice: in my experience, admissions officers love to “talk shop.”

What I also found as I went along was that participants were intrigued when someone formerly of Princeton and Penn Admissions wanted to chat about their work—I treaded shamelessly on this interest. I secured informed consent from each participant.
prior to our conversation. In the email requesting this signed document, I was careful to frame our impending interaction as a conversation rather than a research interview and to emphasize the confidentiality aspect of the form they were about to sign. Both of these tactics seemed to put people at ease and undercut the perception that my work could be used to somehow “catch” institutions out. As much as seemed appropriate, I relied on Penn GSE, personal, and professional connections to facilitate contact with individuals; an additional five conversations were secured through these means.

Still, securing the final participants proved difficult. Three Admissions Directors responded to my emails but cited insufficient time to participate in the study. As noted above, a large portion simply chose to ignore my repeated inquiries. Nine institutions failed to respond to follow up inquiries even after they had indicated interest in participating or after I had already conducted conversations with amenable colleagues in their offices, requested the name of someone else I should speak to, and solicited an introduction. At one institution, a phone call generated a call back and even a date and time for a conversation, but the Admissions Director did not take my call on the appointed date and time and never responded to my follow up emails. In all, I had interactions via phone, email or in-person with 30 individuals representing 25 different institutions in Pennsylvania. This encompasses recorded and transcribed interviews with 24 individual administrators, including three university or college Presidents, as well as unrecorded conversations with two additional administrators and one President.

I began my interviews in July 2015 and completed final interviews in July 2016. Most (10 of 30) interviewees held the title of Director of Admissions. Table 4 displays
individual participants’ titles. All individuals and institutions were given pseudonyms in order to preserve their anonymity. Individuals were given new names; for brevity and clarity, institutions were assigned letters A through Y (See Appendix B for table of pseudonyms of participants and institutions).

Table 4
Overview of titles of individuals in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director of Admissions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director of Admissions &amp; Coordinator of Multicultural Student Recruitment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Director of Admission</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Director of Admissions &amp; Coordinator of Partnerships</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Vice President for Strategic Partnerships</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator of Multicultural Recruitment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of International and Military Recruitment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Multicultural Recruitment and Mentoring</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Recruitment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Recruiter for Partnerships</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President, Enrollment Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President, Institutional Advancement &amp; Strategic Partnerships</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 25 institutions, representatives of three institutions responded via email that they had no partnerships or relationships with third-party nonprofit entities for college access. These institutions did not respond to follow-up inquiries (via email) asking for further clarification or elaboration; we therefore had no further contact. Four HEIs responded in interviews that they had no partnerships or relationships; they nonetheless agreed to speak with me further, producing recorded conversations of close to an hour (during which one of the HEIs revealed one relationship).
Table 5 compares the characteristics of the 25 institutions in the qualitative portion of this study to the 113 institutions in the statistical analyses and illustrates that in general, the characteristics of the 25 institutions in the sample are similar to the characteristics of the 113 institutions in the population. Note that for ease of analysis, I have collapsed the ten highly granular *levels of urbanity* codes into the more general categories of City, Suburb, Town, Rural (which IPEDS uses as the overarching categories). The exceptions are that public institutions are underrepresented in the qualitative sample, and test optional institutions are overrepresented in the qualitative sample.

### Table 5

**A Comparison of the Qualitative and Statistical Samples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selectivity</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of qualitative sample (n=25)</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of statistical sample (PA) (n= 113)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly selective</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately selective</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious affiliation</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of qualitative sample (n=25)</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of statistical sample (PA) (n= 113)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of qualitative sample (n=25)</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of statistical sample (PA) (n= 113)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 - 4,999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 - 9,999</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-19,999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000 and above</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evolution of study methods. As initially proposed, this study was an attempt to understand a few HEIs’ relationships with what they considered their “most important” partner CBOs. The study was to begin with a large-scale survey and conclude with a few focused case studies. A few weeks into data collection, however, it became apparent that the proposed study design was unfeasible; continuing on the same path would render the study impossible to complete. A brief description of these difficulties may be instructive both for those pursuing research on college admissions related topics, as well as more generally useful for students contemplating issues of access to sites and participants. It also sets the scene for a discussion of the methods I ultimately employed to generate data and address my research questions.

In its earliest formulation and in my initial dissertation proposal, the study design called for survey and case study methods to be used to build understanding of
relationships between colleges or universities and college access nonprofits. The first phase would use data from a large-scale survey of admissions personnel to answer questions about the distribution of relationships and level of collaboration between entities. In the second phase of the study, questions pertaining to why selected institutions engage in and maintain relationships would be explored using multiple case study methodologies. I defended the sequencing of methods by arguing that qualitative data could be used to “refine the results from the quantitative data” in particular allowing the “exploration of a few typical cases, probing a key result in more detail, or following up with outlier or extreme cases” (Creswell, 2012, p. 543).

Upon the advice of my committee, after my proposal defense I modified my study design to expand the number of in-depth interviews that I would conduct and broaden the number of institutions in the study. This was in essence a suggestion to move from the study’s focus on extremes – an “inch-deep/mile-wide” survey and two “mile-deep” case studies – to a more medium-level focus on how several institutions of varying kinds strategically employ relationships with college access nonprofits. Another important suggestion was that I revise the study to focus on understanding the universe of ties for several HEIs – the entire landscape of their relationships – rather than just the most important tie for two HEIs. These changes were motivated largely by the thinking that these approaches would afford me a fuller picture of HEIs’ motivation to form and maintain relationships. In addition, I planned to do an electronic survey of as many institutions as I could get to participate, in order to determine the distribution of relationships and the level of collaboration between entities.
**Case studies.** The initial design of this study outlined that the criteria for selecting cases would be an emergent aspect of the design of this study, dependent on which institutions would agree to speak with me. Maxwell (2013) suggested five possible goals that can be fulfilled by the use of the “purposeful selection” of cases: “to achieve representativeness…to adequately capture heterogeneity…to test critical theories…to establish particular comparisons…[or] to select participants with whom you can establish the most productive relationships” (p. 98-99).

Ultimately it was impossible to generate cases, as my initial methodology had called for, because I could not secure participation from institutions. Two institutions initially agreed to take part but the first pulled out when a significant partner organization was undergoing changes to leadership, resulting in some restructuring of the partnership itself. The second was unfeasible as the timeline and the institution’s location together would have required multiple days away from my newborn daughter. As the study progressed, I solicited case study participants at the close of those interviews that seemed most promising (and logistically feasible). Of the three I asked, two said they would run the request past the boss and then never responded and one responded that it was not possible to participate at that time. Instead, I strove to include as many institutions as possible in my qualitative sample, with the aim of aggregating HEIs into meaningful categories as the categories emerged. This approach had the additional benefit of protecting institutions’ anonymity.

**Data collection.** Qualitative data collection consisted of gathering documentation, making observations, and conducting interviews with as many institutions as possible. I
wrote reflective memos (Yin, 2009) after each conversation and used these as additional data; my email correspondence with HEIs was also treated as data. For each interview, I generated an electronic version of the interview protocol on which I noted impressions, noteworthy items, and potential amendments to the protocol for future conversations (see Appendix C). I made additional observations and field notes when I attended events such as the regular gatherings of the Philadelphia College Prep Roundtable (PCPR). Available data consisted of strategic plans, MOUs, and publications (e.g., alumni magazines, student newspapers, popular press articles).

**Pilot testing.** The pilot process was used to test my ideas as well as my instruments (interview and survey protocols) and explore their implications (Maxwell, 2013). After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted (see Appendix D for approval) I undertook four pilot interviews in June and July 2015 with admissions personnel from four non-Pennsylvania HEIs. I chose out-of-state institutions to keep from tainting any future interaction I might have with representatives of in-state institutions, should the study have required substantial changes in terms of formatting, research questions, and/or instruments. Included in the pilot were representatives from one large state institution and three small private liberal arts institutions. Pilot participants were secured by asking my husband, whose position as a Director of College Counseling affords him close contact with a wide variety of institutional admissions personnel, for personal introductions via email. After administering the survey and the interview instruments through phone interviews, I conducted brief conversations with pilot respondents about the degree to which the instruments addressed their experience,
whether there were relevant topics left unaddressed, and whether any aspects of the instruments were irrelevant to the topic, and why.

Several valuable lessons came from these pilot interviews. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the ongoing parsing of language visible in the literature itself, I found in my pilot study that terminology was not uniform across institutions and might not conform to the literature. The pilot study also suggested that the deployment of terms without some concomitant unpacking of terms could encourage participants to self-exclude from the research.

Most relevant was that the issue of terminology was both prominent and widespread enough that it precluded the possibility of deploying an impersonal, large-scale, electronically administered survey. I could not administer an electronic survey when it would require participants to read and interpret long explanation of terms before they could even respond to question 1; it was a recipe for a dismally miniscule response rate. So I set aside the electronically administered survey instrument in favor of administering it orally. Participants also often requested clarification of what I meant by “college access organization,” or even what I meant by “nonprofit.” These themes persisted in the main study and are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Documentation. Documentation included formal written agreements between partners and any readily available information such as strategic plans or planning documents, newspaper articles, reports in alumni magazines or fundraising updates, and the like. I found these documents using web searches for the institution’s name plus a variety of search terms, including “strategic plan,” “planning documents,” and
“partnerships.” Data to answer the research question concerned with institutional goals were drawn primarily from publically available strategic plans as well as conversations with respondents and publically available information such as newspapers and alumni publications. Review of strategic plans helped to clarify the institution’s goals, mission, and steps to take to reach goals. Strategic plans were available for 22 of the institutions in the qualitative sample. For one institution I was only able to find a financial statement, while for two others I found plans related specifically to diversity and equity at the institutions. Plans ranged from 2-38 pages in length, and included vaguely worded statements as well as clearly stated goals, both numerical and qualitative. Some plans took the form of Power Point presentations while others were Word documents or PDFs. Some were written and produced by professionals while others were home grown documents.

**Interviews.** Interviews are an important element for any researcher interested in “developing detailed descriptions, integrating multiple perspectives, describing process, developing holistic description, learning how events are interpreted” (Weiss, 1994, p. 8-9). Interviews formed the bulk of the data I collected for this research. The initial interview protocol (see Appendix C) was developed to elicit information about how focal relationships came to exist and what factors were most important in the formation of that relationship and its continued existence. In particular, I was interested in whether institutions worked with any other entities to improve access to or enrollment in their institutions; how many of those entities were governmental, nonprofit, or “other”; the extent to which they focused on low-income and/or URM students; how long
relationships had been in place; whether there were formal agreements, contracts or MOUs present; and the most important reasons for which HEIs entered into and maintained relationships.

My research questions suggested that selecting interviewees with two types of specialized knowledge would be important: those knowledgeable about the institution’s overall strategy with regard to college access, and those immersed in the day-to-day workings of the relationship. These are often not the same person. For instance, within admissions, the Dean (or equivalent) is generally responsible for an admission office’s overall strategy, which in turn may be derived from the President’s overall vision for the institution. The Director of Admission is usually responsible for the day-to-day internal workings of the office, and serves as the general manager. The director of a partnership, on the other hand, may be a second year admissions officer or a more senior staff member, and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the relationship.

In every case, I had only one opportunity to interview each individual. In keeping with my attempts to both test the major constructs at the heart of this study while also allowing for the emergence of context-specific themes, interviews were semi-structured (Weiss, 1994). Using a service, conversations were transcribed within 7-10 days of the conversation taking place, and upon receipt were re-read. I wrote analytic memos (Yin, 2009) to record my initial impressions and used these to begin a preliminary list of themes and codes. All raw data—emails, transcripts and coded transcripts, descriptions of materials, institutional strategic plans, field notes, and analytic memos—were stored and managed using a password-protected Dropbox electronic document storage account.
**Data analysis.** Coding of interview transcript data, as well as all other forms of data (e.g., strategic plans), occurred in two phases using the electronic software program HyperRESEARCH. In the first phase I employed deductive coding and *a priori* “orienting constructs and propositions” to test propositions derived from existing theory and research (Miles et al., 2014, p. 238). Initial codes were drawn from relevant literature reviewed in Chapter Two and included necessity, asymmetry, reciprocity, stability, legitimacy, efficiency (Oliver, 1990) and exploration and exploitation (which are aspects of organizational learning) (March, 1991).

The exploratory nature of this research and the relatively underdeveloped knowledge base about this phenomenon necessitated a secondary phase employing an inductive approach to coding data. Inductive coding allowed for the discovery of “recurrent phenomena in the stream of field experiences and [the process of] find[ing] relations among them,” rather than forcing my extant theories onto data (Miles et al., 2014, p. 238). Mixing both deductive and inductive forms of coding allowed me to both test major elements of the conceptual framework of this study—drawn largely from business and management literature—while also capturing emergent themes that may be unique to the educational context under study (Miles et al., 2014). In addition, it allowed insight into noteworthy patterns such two codes regularly appearing together, or conversely, two codes never appearing together. These data are used to address the research questions pertaining to why relationships are formed and maintained.

**Analysis of strategic planning documents.** I analyzed available strategic planning documents using a combination of codes corresponding to pre-existing and emergent
concepts. After my first pass through the data I developed a spreadsheet to keep track of common themes emerging from the data. I began to track whether the terms “diversity,” “low-income/Pell,” “first generation,” or “minority” – concepts often associated with the notion of college access – were mentioned in the plan. I highlighted text associated with each term and pasted it into the spreadsheet. I noted whether partnerships or relationships were mentioned, and highlighted and pasted this text as well. I then expanded the analyses to include other emergent constructs associated with diversity, such as “faculty diversity” and “international students as part of diversity.” Finally, I did another pass through the data and noted whether the institution listed specific numerical goals; made reference to demographic changes; described itself as tuition-driven; and/or made express references to increasing enrollment. Whenever possible, I highlighted the texts and pasted it into the spreadsheet for reference.

Validity. Setting aside the ongoing debate about the applicability of the term “validity” to qualitative research, the major threats to the “trustworthiness, authenticity, and quality” of my research study are researcher bias, or the influence of my prior experience with the phenomenon on the collection and analysis of data, and reactivity, which is how study participants may be influenced by me as the researcher (Maxwell, 2013, p. 122). One way I had planned to address this threat to validity was to engage in member checking, or “systematically soliciting feedback about [my] data and conclusions from the people [I was] studying” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126).

Member checking proved impossible, however, since in all cases it turned out that in spite of my efforts, I had but one opportunity to speak with any given participant.
Furthermore, though I received many (un-coerced) invitations from admissions officers to “be in touch,” most were unresponsive to follow-up emails, even in spite of my efforts to create “natural” excuses to interact. For instance, after I had received and reviewed transcriptions, I made a point to reach back out to participants to thank them and point out how interesting the conversation was in some specific way, or to ask a clarifying question. I received responses from three of the eight people to whom I reached out. One of only four people I spoke with in person for this study had spoken to me with great enthusiasm for over an hour, yet she also failed to respond to several follow-up emails. Of the three HEIs that specifically requested (via email) that I send them my questions so they could collect information and respond via email, all three failed to respond, even after I sent a carefully crafted and much-abridged set of questions. Seven institutions that I had promising exchanges with over email – indicating a willingness to have a conversation with me – simply stopped responding.

There are several reasons that might explain this lack of responsiveness. In looking back over my reflective memos, I had no reason to think that people did not want to speak with me further because I had overstepped my bounds, for instance, or because conversations had been in some way uncomfortable. It seems more likely, given the numerous responses of “I’m understaffed” or “I don’t have enough time,” that an additional query was simply as an undue burden. Perhaps participants felt they had “done their duty” by having one conversation with me, and could spare no more time. Finally, while I chose to conduct research in the summer months to avoid the busiest admissions season, this timing also coincided with vacation and staff turnover season.
Member checking is often valued because it allows participants to raise alternative explanations not accounted for in the researcher’s conceptual or theoretical frameworks (Yin, 2009). Since individual member checks were impossible, I instead probed interesting emergent concepts in subsequent interviews with other admissions personnel. This practice resulted in an ongoing process whereby each successive interview (up to a point) generated slight revisions to the interview protocol. For instance, an early conversation uncovered unanticipated reasons for which some institutions did not seek out relationships with nonprofits; in subsequent conversations with similar HEIs, I checked whether this reason was a concept that resonated. Early conversations also signaled the futility of questions aimed at eliciting the “most important” reasons for partnership and offering fixed choices – these reasons were too intertwined for them to be rank ordered, and forced choices failed to allow for respondents to elucidate their own thinking.

This study adheres to Yin’s (2009) recommendation that multiple sources of data be collected in order to ensure my ability to “develop…converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration” (pp. 115-116). The quantitative and qualitative data collected during this study will in some cases assist in the process of triangulation, wherein multiple data sources are used to address the same question (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). For instance, both quantitative data and interviews were used to assess a particular fact, that is: whether the percentage of low-income or minority students on campus had risen.
In order to test the validity of my conclusions, as often as possible I employed several strategies suggested by Maxwell (2013) including: repeated interviews and observations representing the same site; “rich data” consisting of transcripts and detailed observations and field notes; and triangulation, or the collection of information from numerous sources (pp. 126-129). I also made a concerted effort to search for “discrepant evidence and negative cases,” for instance by asking about partnerships that were ended or failed, and by interviewing former employees who no longer had an incentive to say only positive things about a particular relationship (Maxwell, 2013, p. 127). I also engaged in peer debriefing (Yin, 2009) to test the validity of my conclusions against those drawn by other researchers. I relied in particular on former and current admissions professionals that have had professional experience at “typical” institutions similar those in my sample as well as other individuals with experience at college access nonprofits. These included former colleagues at Penn Admissions; a current director of college counseling with 13 years of admissions experience; and college access nonprofit professionals.

Limitations to the Study

This research has several limitations. The most important is that, with few exceptions, I spoke with a single representative at each institution. There are many implications to this particular limitation, including unevenness of experience. For instance, in some cases participants had been at their institutions more than a decade, in others, less than a year. Heavy reliance on the recall and memory of a single individual can be problematic. In some cases participants had access to records related to
relationships with CBOs and nonprofits, including when the relationship began, how many students were associated with it, how often the group visited the college, and so on. But access to this information was the exception, not the rule.

Furthermore, it may strain believability to assert that an institution’s practices, let alone motivations, can be captured through a conversation with a single person. There was some limited evidence that two people within the same office at the same institution (e.g., at HEI C) would give divergent responses to the same basic question of whether their institution has relationships with external entities, but this could be attributed more to differing perceptions of terminology than actual misunderstandings. As discussed in Chapter 4, differing perceptions of terminology may have also resulted in an inflated number of “no relationships” responses. I anticipated this limitation in the process of design of the study, and attempted to mitigate its negative effects by triangulating across data sources including websites, popular press, and publically available information (e.g., strategic plans), as well as conversations with additional institutional representatives.

Finally, my focus on asking HEI representatives exclusively about nonprofit entities they work with on college access omitted from this study attention to relationships HEIs had with government-funded and/or private, for-profit organizations. While this omission does potentially limit my ability to understand the full scope of a single HEI’s relationships for college access (if the list of entities includes for-profit and government organizations), this study was explicitly designed to gather information on an understudied category of college access organizations: nongovernmental nonprofits.
In designing the study, I had hoped that the relatively large size of my qualitative sample—as well as my assurances to preserve institutional anonymity and personal experiences as a professional in the industry—would sufficiently allay respondents’ fears of exposure and encourage candid participation. As the research process concludes, I believe that I achieved candid participation. Furthermore, it is my sense that organizations’ and individuals’ natural interest in the project of increasing college access incentivized involvement in the study.

Nonetheless, some institutional representatives may have explicitly chosen to self-exclude from the study, perhaps for reasons of wanting to keep me from “looking under the hood” of the institution. Questions about how to achieve access—as well as how HEIs think about it and are motivated to do the work of create access—can be a sensitive topic, from an institutional standpoint. HEIs may have been unwilling to discuss or to reveal what could be seen as strategy or, conversely, a lack of strategy. My failed attempts to secure permission to conduct a case study at one institution indicate the sensitivity some institutions may have to being scrutinized especially in a period of change. At this particular HEI, the institution pulled out of the case study after changes in leadership at a partner NPO put the relationship into, if not peril, at least rebuilding mode. This anecdote raises the possibility that the most interesting cases—where a great deal of movement or deal making around partnership creation is underway—are not represented in this study.

Regarding design limitations, there may be several. The loosely sequential design of this study was disrupted by the relatively slow summer pace of admissions offices, a
time during which the ideal respondent was difficult to locate. The difficulty of locating sufficient participants over the course of the first summer of data collection necessitated a second summer of data collection. In between summers, I assembled and analyzed quantitative data. In addition, the choice to focus on admission offices to garner study participants, while strategic, also had limitations in that many admissions offices experience very high staff turnover in summers. Such staff changes meant that in more than one case the most knowledgeable person had recently moved on to another institution.

The small size of the sample means that I can draw only preliminary conclusions and that these conclusions will need to be tested in future research. Despite the interest in why relationships are maintained over time, this study is not longitudinal but cross-sectional. This limitation has been pointed out by other researchers (e.g., Parker & Selsky, 2004) as being a persistent issue in studies of interorganizational relationships (IORs). However, several constraints make a longitudinal study unfeasible in this case. Longitudinal studies typically follow the same population repeatedly over time, but admissions offices represent a barrier to this in that there is often turnover from year to year. A group of participants in constant flux could render the case study conclusions suspect. In addition, studying a sample more than once a year would likely be perceived as burdensome, since admissions cycles last roughly a year and most processes (recruitment, selection, and yield of students) take place just once a year.

The limitations to this research do not outweigh its utility, particularly as an exploratory and foundational study. Rather, these limitations suggest further fruitful
avenues for exploration and study. Directions for future research are discussed in the final chapter.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

The central purpose of this research was to explore, document, and potentially develop some categorizations around the range and variation in ways that HEIs interact with NPOs with the goal of improving college access. In order to accomplish this goal, it was necessary to understand the context in which these institutions exist, in particular with respect to demographic changes, high school graduation rates, and number of high school graduates in Pennsylvania. The first section of this chapter gives an overview of these contextual data. Following this, I present findings with respect to my first research question, which asks whether there are statistical relationships between institutional characteristics and institutions’ percentages of URM or Pell-eligible students over time. These data are then integrated with findings generated through the qualitative portion of this study.

Demographic and Educational Context of Pennsylvania

As a percentage of the population of Pennsylvania, white, non-Hispanic people are in decline (though still the majority), declining from 82.9% of the population in 2010 to 81.6% in 2015 (U.S. Census, 2010b). The percentages of African Americans, American Indians, and Asians are rising slowly while the percentage of the population identifying as Hispanic has been steadily rising, from 5.2% in 2010 to 6.4% in 2015 (U.S. Census, 2010b). While the overall graduation rate of high school students in Pennsylvania has been rising, the raw number of students – both potential graduates and actual graduates – has been declining. Table 6 displays these data.
Table 6
*Pennsylvania High School Graduates and Graduation Rates 2010-2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total High School Graduates</th>
<th>Total Cohort</th>
<th>Total Grad Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>117,212</td>
<td>138,309</td>
<td>84.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>121,357</td>
<td>142,016</td>
<td>85.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>123,613</td>
<td>144,513</td>
<td>85.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>123,599</td>
<td>148,020</td>
<td>83.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>126,871</td>
<td>153,546</td>
<td>82.63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 2016, enrollment at Pennsylvania HEIs was down 2.6% compared to 2015; nationally, enrollment in 2016 was down 1.7% compared to 2015 (National Student Clearinghouse, 2016). Overall higher education enrollment nationally was down 5 years in a row (National Student Clearinghouse, 2016).

Over time, there has been a statistically significant increase in the average percentage of URM students (that is, African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians) enrolled at the 113 four-year colleges and universities in Pennsylvania. The average of representation of URM students among undergraduates at these institutions rose from 10.4% in 1994 to 21.8% in 2014. Pell eligible students comprised an average of 30.3% of the student body at Pennsylvania four-year institutions in 2000; this percentage rose to 35.1% in 2014. Figure 3 illustrates these data.
The year-over-year increase in the percentage of Pell recipients at Pennsylvania institutions was statistically significant only in 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2012-13. With the exceptions of 1999-00 and 2002-03, in every year for which data are available, there was a statistically significant year-over-year increase in Pennsylvania institutions’ average percentage of URM students.

**Institutional Characteristics’ Relationship to URM or Pell Student Percentage**

Before beginning analysis of institutional characteristics to Pell or URM percentages, I conducted analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests to determine whether the HEIs where I conducted interviews varied together or separately with respect to the representation of Pell Grant recipients or URMs. ANOVAs indicated that the institutions where I conducted interviews did not significantly vary over time or as a group from those where I did not conduct interviews with respect to Pell or URM percentages.
ANOVA indicated whether there were statistically significant differences in Pell and URM percentages over time across institutional characteristics.

**Control of institution.** The institution’s status as public or private (“control of institution”) had a statistically significant relationship to the percentage of Pell recipients for every year of data except 2002-03. Control of institution had no relationship to the percentage of URM students. Figure 4 indicates that as a group, public institutions had higher percentages Pell recipients than private institutions.

![Graph showing average percentage Pell recipients at Pennsylvania four-year higher education institutions by control of institution, 2000–2014. Source: IPEDS.](image)

**Figure 4.** Average Percentage Pell Recipients at Pennsylvania Four-Year Higher Education Institutions by Control of Institution, 2000 – 2014. *Source:* IPEDS.

**Selectivity.** The representation of Pell recipients varied across the three selectivity levels in each year for which data are available. A Tukey’s post-hoc test indicates that there were no statistically significant differences between moderately selective and inclusive HEIs in 1999-2000, 2000-01, 2001-02, 2003-04, and 2004-05. Level of
institutional selectivity was unrelated to the percentage of URM students. Figure 5 indicates that HEIs with no selectivity information (n = 4) had the highest percentages of Pell recipients across all years of data, ranging from a low of 43.3% in 2006 to a high of 70% in 2014. Inclusive HEIs had the next-highest averages of Pell recipients, with a low of 34.8% in 2001 to a high of 46.7% in 2011. Highly selective HEIs had the overall lowest percentages of Pell recipients, ranging from a low of 14.3% in 2009 to a high of 19.6% in 2011.

![Figure 5](image.png)

*Figure 5. Average Percentage Pell Recipients at Pennsylvania Four-Year Higher Education Institutions by Selectivity of Institution, 2000 – 2014. Source: IPEDS.*

**Size.** A Tukey’s post-hoc indicates that starting in 2004-05 there were statistically significant differences in the percentage of Pell recipients at HEIs of different sizes; prior to this year there were no differences. The five separate size categories give me some
hesitation in interpreting these data, however, because the number of HEIs in each category is small. In the smallest institutional size category, for instance, there are only 16 HEIs; in the largest two there are only four and five, respectively. Figure 6 illustrates that the smallest institutions – those with fewer than 1,000 students – had the highest average of Pell recipients over time.

**Figure 6.** Average Percentage of Pell Recipients at Pennsylvania four-year Higher Education Institutions by Institutional Size, 2000 – 2014. *Source: IPEDS.*

**Urban-ness.** There were no statistically significant differences among the four levels of urban-ness in terms of representation of Pell students, but starting in 2008-09 there were statistically significant differences in the percentage of URM students by level of urban-ness. Starting in 2008-09 onward, there were statistically significant differences every year between HEIs in suburban locals versus those classified as located in towns.
(level 2 vs. level 3). As in the case of institutional size, the four categories of urban-ness lead to a small number of institutions in each category, and give me pause in interpreting these data. Finally, religious affiliation has no relationship to percentages of Pell or URM students over time. Figure 7 indicates that institutions classified as suburban and city schools had the highest percentages of URM students over time.

![Figure 7](image)

*Figure 7. Average Percentage URM at Pennsylvania four-year Higher Education Institutions by Level of Urban-ness, 1994 – 2014. Source: IPEDS*

While these analyses do not indicate which specific institutions will have more or fewer Pell grant recipients or URM students, they do suggest that several institutional characteristics may be related to the percentage of Pell students on campus. Particularly important appear to be control of institution, selectivity and size of institution. The institutional characteristics I explored – with the possible exception of urban-ness –
appear to be unrelated to the representation of URM students. Institutional characteristics are considered in more depth in the qualitative portion of this study.

Participants’ Understandings of College Access Organizations and Relationships

The central aim of this study was to understand institution’s motivations to engage in and sustain relationships with nonprofits, but in order to understand motivation I needed to understand participants’ conceptions of several key constructs. In essence, I needed to define important terms as they are used in practice. In particular, before I could begin to understand why HEIs formed relationships with NPOs, I had to understand both what HEIs believed to be a relationship and what HEIs understood to be a college access organization.

This section begins by presenting the findings related to how participants understood what I was asking; in essence, how they understood and conceived of the concept nonprofit college access organization and what it means to have a relationship with such an entity. This brief explanation of the implications of how participants understood the goals and focus of this study sets the stage for two sections that follow, in which I offer, first, findings on how HEIs defined college access nonprofit and second, findings on how HEIs defined relationships. I then discuss how institutions describe their goals with respect to college access and diversity. The final two sections are devoted to HEIs’ goals for relationships with NPOs and the reasons institutions give for engaging in and sustaining relationships with NPOs.

The first finding to emerge from the qualitative portion of this study is that there was very little agreement on what constitutes “a relationship” between HEIs and NPOs. I
deliberately chose to use this particular word – *relationship* – for my initial written contact with potential participants, particularly after my pilot study suggested divergence in understanding and usage of terms. Based on both the pilot study and my own professional grounding in college admissions, I understood the term “relationship” in this context to encompass everything from contracts and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between HEIs and NPOs, to HEIs keeping an internal list of NPOs to which they would do site visits during fall recruitment, to far looser, more informal, less frequent interactions. I had hoped that I would capture the full range and variety of relationship permutations by using a word that does not connote an extreme level of formality. I worried that admissions professionals would be more likely to exclude themselves from the study if my word choice made it appear as though formal relationships were a prerequisite to participation, so I chose the more generic term *relationship*.

The use of *relationship* turned out to be problematic, however, as some respondents interpreted it as *partnership* and therefore assumed that I was asking whether they had any contractual relationships. In an exchange that was representative of numerous interactions I had with admissions professionals, I used the word *relationship* in an email to invite an HEI to participate, but the response was instead about *partnerships*. I wrote to the Director of Admission, “I am reaching out to you today to ask if you would be willing to speak with me about HEI K’s relationships with nonprofit organizations.” (C. McManus email to Mandy, HEI K, 7/16/15). She responded, “Thank you for your email. I don’t think I would add much to your research. We do not partner with non-profits at the moment. I wish you luck in your research project” (Mandy, HEI
K, email to C. McManus, 7/16/15). When I contacted another HEI’s Director of Admission, I was initially directed to the staff member who administered a program run internally that reached out to academically support local high school students before eventually circling back around to speaking with the Director. My reading of this occurrence at the time was not that I was being put off, but rather that the Director was genuinely attempting to understand my interest and connect me to the right person. This sense was ultimately supported by my conversation with the Director, who was both incredibly forthcoming and very thoughtful.

To glean as much information as possible about the range and variation of relationships that higher education institutions have with nonprofit organizations, I framed my inquiry as focusing on any and all contact between entities around the college access agenda (as described in the passage above). It was only after I began to ask the more open-ended question, “Does the admissions office at your institution work with any other organization(s) to help improve access to (or enrollment) in your institution?” that I was able to elicit more information. This framing allowed respondents to decide what was worthy of mention and offer their own definitions of “relationship” and “college access organization.”

**Defining “nonprofit college access organization.”** As in my attempts to understand how participants thought about and understood the concept of relationships, I encouraged respondents to decide which “college access organization” were worthy of mention. Participants’ responses indicated that they understood college access organizations to be defined by their stated function or aims – facilitating college access –
over their form, that is, whether they were a school, church or other type of organization. HEI also had relationships with organizations the provided direct services to students. Of the 25 HEIs in the qualitative portion of the study, 18 had what they believed fell under the category of a relationship with a nonprofit organization for college access purposes; the remaining seven institutions did not maintain relationships or this kind. Table 7 and Figure 8, were constructed using respondents’ understandings of both “relationship” and “college access organization.”

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Urban-ness</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suburb</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiously affiliated</td>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selectivity</td>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderately selective</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highly selective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No information</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>Under 1,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,000 - 4,999</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,000 - 9,999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10,000 - 19,999</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20,000 and above</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The largest number of relationships any one institution reported was 18. Two HEIs maintained just one relationship each. The average number of relationships per institution was 6.6, but the mode was just two relationships per HEI. Figure 8 illustrates the distribution of the number of relationships reported by the 18 institutions that indicated they had relationships and also disaggregates the category into which the largest number of HEIs fell (i.e., 1-5 relationships).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Relationships</th>
<th>Count of HEIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8. Distribution of Relationships Among HEIs.*

*Understanding informed by function over form.* As suggested by the range and variation in responses, and the clarifying questions I was asked in response to my initial queries about whether HEIs worked with NPOs for college access (and if so, which ones), participants held an assortment of understandings of what constitutes a college access organization. They understood a “college access organization” as any entity that aimed to address issues of enrollment in higher education or that had as part of its mission a focus on college. A passage culled from my conversation with a longtime
Director of Multicultural Recruitment at a private, suburban, moderately selective HEI is emblematic of this multiplicity in terms of both organizational form and function:

I know that you mentioned non-profit, non-governmental [organizations in your question]. Even a lot of our partnerships, if you will, or relationships, are with schools, schools that have the same, I would say, goals. That would be Christian education. We do some partnerships with Christian schools. We do partnerships with—we have at least one charter school. We have an organization in Camden, which is mostly school and a youth program. They do a lot of after school and summer programs. Then we have another partnership with an organization that’s more of a, not a rec center, but a community center in [the town nearby]. We also do some things with some of our alum[s] that have ministry related or Christian organizations that they’re a part of such as…Christian Path. The other is [a] college tour organization called CECAAL [Christian Education Coalition for African-American Leadership]. I’m sorry I don’t have the complete name for you. We have a variety of different program that we work with, either contractual or not. We also do some things with college access. The Philadelphia College Prep Round Table.” (Betsy, HEI H)

This passage elucidates the range and variation in organizations that a single HEI might work with, including churches, a local charter school, an association of Christian educators, and an association of HEIs, nonprofits, and individual educators. This passage also illustrates how professionals may conceive of college access efforts as consisting of a constellation of actors and entities and, moreover, a range of levels of formality.

Across the 18 study HEIs that acknowledged relationships with NPOs, 120 total responses were given to the question, “Whom do you work with?” These 120 responses represented 97 different organizations. To understand the range and variation in the organizations mentioned and to bring some order to the many entities mentioned, I developed a spreadsheet to list each organization and to collect relevant information about it. I used websites to find mission statement, main aims, function, and constituencies, and whether they provided direct services to students such as tutoring,
college application guidance, etc. Through this process I was unable to code five of the 97 different organizations mentioned. Despite my follow up emails to participants for clarification, I was unable to track down websites or any further information about them based on the names the HEIs provided. Their status as active or defunct, for-profit or nonprofit, was impossible to determine, so I excluded them from additional analyses. With the exception of a single fee-based for-profit company that recruited international students for U.S. colleges and universities – also excluded from further consideration – the remaining 91 individual entities were all nonprofits.

Based on information gleaned from websites, eight clear sub-categories of organization emerged across the total responses given (120 answers – 5 uncodable – 1 nonprofit = 114 HEIs). Table 8 shows that 48 of the 114 total usable named nonprofit organizations fall into the following six groups: charter school or charter network, association, federal program, institutional program, church, and private school (non-charter). All the charter schools and charter networks mentioned were free public schools managed independently, that is, not by a school district. An association is an organized entity that provided services or a forum for discussion, or action, or information sharing to its institutional members, including higher education institutions, college counselors, and/or community groups. Examples of associations include the National Association of College and Admissions Counselors (NACAC) and the Lehigh Valley Area of Independent Colleges Association (LVAIC). Federal programs are those funded by the government including the federal Upward Bound and the Educational Opportunity
Centers (EOC). An institutional program is one that was administered by an HEI itself. I classified the other 67 named entities as generic “nonprofits.”

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Org type</th>
<th>Times mentioned</th>
<th>Percentage of total responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit (generic)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Network</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Program</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Emphasis on providing direct services to students.* Across the institutions in this study, there was great range and variation with respect to organizations named as helping to promote college access. From a review of NPOs’ websites, I determined that of the 114 entities named by HEIs, 79 (69%) provided some sort of direct services to students such as tutoring, counseling, support in the application process, help in filling out forms, or other forms of explicitly student-centered, interactive activities. This group included charter schools (4%) and charter networks (11%) as well as private schools (5%); 54 (46%) of the entities that provided direct services were in the general nonprofit category.

The 35 organizations that did not offer direct services fulfilled other functions, and included scholarship organizations and foundations, which provided only funding; affinity and social organizations such as Young Life (Christian) and Jack & Jill (African American); and nonprofits such as I’m First (first-generation college students) and The TalentED Project (lower-income, first-generation) that served as sources of information.
and resource hubs for targeted groups of students. Table 9 displays all 15 entities that were mentioned at least twice by HEIs, their type, and whether they offer direct services to students.

Table 9

Most Frequently Mentioned Organizations by Type and Total Mentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Org Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Direct services?</th>
<th>Total mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh Promise</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton Hershey School</td>
<td>Private School</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet the Mid-Atlantic Conference (MAC)</td>
<td>Association</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Charter Network</td>
<td>Charter network</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIPP Charter Schools</td>
<td>Charter network</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES Prep Charter Network</td>
<td>Charter network</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Promise</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia Futures</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia College Prep Roundtable</td>
<td>Association</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ SEEDS</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm First</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate!Philadelphia</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO College Erie</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Bound</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Education Coalition for African-American Leadership</td>
<td>Association</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants’ Understandings of Relationships

As a group, HEIs contacted as part of this study had a wide range of kinds of relationships with NPOs, from formal contracts and MOUs to less formal interactions. Some relationships included an exchange of funds, while others did not. There was also variation across HEIs: some institutions had a collection of formal relationships while others had only informal relationships. HEIs both sought out NPOs and were receptive to overtures from NPOs.
**Formal relationships: contracts and MOUs.** Formal relationships, as signified by contracts and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), were not the predominant form of relationship. Of the 18 institutions that acknowledged relationships with college access organizations, seven (39%) had relationships that involved contracts and/or MOUs. Three of these seven had both contracts and MOUs; three had contracts but no MOUs; one had MOUs but no contracts. Figure 9 depicts the distribution of relationships that were mentioned in interviews.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 9. Distribution of formal and informal relationships among study HEIs.*

Table 10 depicts the extent to which partnerships were present in planning documents as compared with their mention in conversations with institutional representatives.
Table 10
Partnerships in Planning Documents Compared to Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HEI has relationships</th>
<th>No relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partnership in planning</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>documents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership not in planning</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>documents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning documents not</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The seven HEIs that acknowledged in interviews that they maintained relationships with contracts or MOUs were not the same seven HEIs whose planning documents mentioned partnerships. Of the seven institutions that did mention partnerships of some kind in planning documents, three of these had both contracts and MOUs and one had only contracts. The other four HEIs had only informal relationships, despite a formal statement of interest in relationships.

Financial arrangements. The financial dimensions of formal, contract- or MOU-based relationships between HEIs and NPOs remain shadowy. First, the small number of institutions that maintained contractual relationships and MOUs (7 HEIs) makes it difficult to come to firm conclusions about the dimensions of these relationships. I can only note that these relationships took several forms with respect to finances. Virtually all contract- or MOU-based relationships described by HEI representatives required some financial outlay by the HEI associated with recruiting the students affiliated with the NPO. This often took the form, for instance, of a small fee to attend a college fair, plus the costs of travel and a hotel room. In most cases the agreed-upon exchange between HEI and NPO was not financial, but instead took the form of in-kind goods and services.
For instance the HEI staff would share information about admissions and financial aid with the NPO’s students and, in exchange, the HEI staff would have the opportunity to speak to the NPO’s students.

At least five HEIs had MOUs or contracts that specified a payment of some kind to the NPO (HEI A, HEI C, HEI G, HEI P, HEI U). This information was not disclosed to me directly; rather, I extrapolated it based on knowing they have a partner NPO in common. These five institutions were all private HEIs; four of the five were moderately selective and one was highly selective. It was not made clear to me in conversations or in available documents what exact expenses this fee paid for. Some HEIs made a financial commitment to students affiliated with particular NPOs, usually in the form of enhanced financial aid (HEI A, HEI G, HEI H, HEI J, HEI P). Of these five HEIs, all were private institutions; three were moderately selective and two were highly selective. Four of the five institutions had relationships with charter schools or networks. Based on my conversations, some MOUs and contracts included more than one of these elements.

The precise financial details of contracts and MOUs were only hinted at in the interviews; these findings were generated based on a combination of acknowledgements by HEI representatives and extrapolated from knowing that certain NPOs either require payment for partnership or require a specific financial arrangement for their students. Only one institution was willing to let me examine an MOU. This was an MOU with a charter school, and my request had to be approved by the president (who was one of my interviewees). But, this document did not elucidate the financial details of the relationship. The absence of these data represents a limitation to the knowledge this study
contributes about the financial relationships between HEIs and NPOs. This drawback was not entirely unanticipated, as when I worked in Admissions and directed a partnership with a nonprofit, I was not involved in the development or signing of the yearly contract. This information was for the Dean’s eyes only.

**Services offered.** Respondents reported that contracts and MOUs included a range of activities. These most frequently included an agreement that the HEI would provide information regarding admissions and financial aid through on-campus visitation and/or visitation to the NPO’s site. Other common elements were that the HEI would waive application fees and pay the costs of the bus ride to campus and lunch for students while on campus. Less common were requirements that the HEI would guarantee particular financial aid packages to affiliated students, contract out professors to teach classes, and admit a certain number of students each year that were affiliated with the NPO. Overall, there was more variation than similarity with regard to the kinds of activities HEIs agreed to provide in these formal relationships.

Typically formal relationships included what one HEI described as a kind of à la carte menu of items from which a nonprofit could pick and choose in constructing an MOU, depending on what the NPO believed its students needed:

> It could mean discount tuition for staff and volunteers or something like that, with an organization that we’re working with, on top of the things that we’re trying to provide, whether doing different financial aid talks for students and things like that. It could mean waiving application fees and stuff like that, or helping with bringing them up on campus and open house days or private visits. Buy them lunches when they come up as a group and stuff like that, and be in a place where they can always bring their students. It definitely can range. (Daniel, HEI D)
In a similar vein, a Multicultural Recruiter at another HEI echoed how the aim was to first “look at what the organization wants to accomplish and then we figure out whether we can help them with that” (Betsy, HEI H) by offering a range of options from which to choose. She described how one K-12 school they partnered with wanted a faculty member to teach college classes at the school’s location. She went on, 

We were able to do that. The contract would say that we’re going to offer a...professor. I believe it’s—they have to pay for the professor, the organization does. For what the professor might get here for class they [the school] would have to, by contract, pay that amount. They wouldn’t have to pay anything else...The contract would basically be—there’s a financial end to it but then there’s the academic piece as well. That’s pretty much what it looks like. (Betsy, HEI H)

As indicated in interviews, some relationships were more explicitly admissions centered, and focused on what this department could provide to NPOs and their students. An institution indicated in conversation that one of their MOUs listed an agreed-upon number of students that would be admitted on a yearly basis from the partner NPO. The agreement also included a commitment from the HEI to pay for a student and parent to visit the institution prior to being admitted, and commitments that the HEI would attend the NPO’s events (Anthony, HEI G). Similarly, another institution indicated that its MOUs with a scholarship program and two charter networks stipulated that the HEI would commit to sending admissions representatives to any student-centered admissions workshops, college fairs, and other college-related events planned by the partner organization. It also stated a goal to “recruit, admit and enroll a cohort of 15 students” from the organization “in the first two years” of the partnership (HEI P, MOU). The
Associate Director then went on to describe the institution’s financial commitment to students and how it was identical across other MOUs (to which I did not have access).

**Interviewee:** I mean, across the board, any student…that’s coming into [the college through] one of these partnerships…[t]hey will come in with a financial aid commitment from us…

**Interviewer:** Okay. For each one of the MOUs, each of those organizations has a different agreement with regard to how much financial aid the students will get?

**Interviewee:** Not how much. How many students. Yeah, for instance, any student who we bring in through, yeah, [Charter A], there’s no specific minimum or maximum [number of students] that we would admit, but anyone who comes in gets a full need met financial aid, other than the federal and state loans if they’re coming from Pennsylvania. Then the [Pride] scholars, and that’s a program that works specifically with undocumented students. They actually come in with some money, what would be considered the money they would have gotten from the federal government had they been to able to receive federal funding. That is a kind of a promise on [the NPO’s] end. Then on our end, is filling up that gap with scholarship and grants. Then, [Charter B] is a little bit different. There is a small minimum number technically that is in the MOU there. Our institutional policy is that any student that is admitted will have that type of scholarship [full need met financial aid] associated with their acceptance. We have [exceeded] the number [of students admitted through the partnership] each time in terms of what we have in the MOU, cuz that’s our institutional commitment. (Jean, HEI P)

This moderately selective, private, urban HEI had numerous relationships, exclusively with nonprofits and charter schools/networks, and was the only HEI that allowed me to review a partnership contract or MOU. The document the HEI representative shared was an agreement with a charter school network. What I found was a multifaceted, systems-based approach to addressing college access that did not stop at
admission to the HEI, but extended forward to a concern for retention and graduation rates and backward to include curricular alignment between entities. The MOU states that the HEI had a responsibility to coordinate pre-enrollment outreach…to ensure [students] transition smoothly” and “collaborate with the appointed teaching and professional staff members to identify early alert triggers that decrease persistence…[and to] counter those triggers. (HEI P, MOU)

The charter school, in turn, was responsible for “review[ing] HEI P’s entry-level course expectations” to align curriculum and “facilitate the provision of such resources…to support [student] persistence goals” (HEI P, MOU). This document made explicit that both entities had responsibilities. The charter network promised to “portray [the institution] as an attractive higher education option” and the HEI promised to appoint faculty mentors to accepted students, track student and alumni success, and ease students’ financial burden (HEI P, MOU).

*Formal yet flexible.* Contractual relationships, such as the one summarized above, are reasonably viewed as formal and legalistic. Yet interviews revealed a degree of flexibility to these contractual relationships in practice. In interviews with an Admissions Director and university president, as well as in planning documents and written contracts, the institution quoted above painted a picture of a contractual relationship that required working toward a target of 15 students, a 6-year graduation rate of 75%, and the development of various tools, programs and services that would contribute to the achievement of these goals. Yet the admission director pointed out that there is built-in wiggle room and, moreover, a distinct lack of rigidity around the process of admission itself:
You know, we’re not working with quotas here. I mean, if we have a good student [identified by the NPO]—if I have a call yesterday for a student who wants to come in three weeks to be a student here, I’m gonna work with that counselor and I’m gonna work with that student. You know, we’re not lookin’ at that cutoff, that May 1st was it. You know? [We’re not saying,] “Too bad, so sad [you missed the deadline].” We really are working with these organizations as a partnership. (Jean, HEI P)

An Assistant Director at another HEI described its contract with an NPO by foregrounding the variety of activities performed and benefits conferred on students associated with that single partner. Ameliorating the financial sting for students was important, but did not receive the same emphasis as in the passage above. In both the example below and the example above, the interviewees offer examples of how they did not strictly adhere to the standards specified in the contract, and that made accommodations with the goal of building the relationship with the partner organization.

*Interviewee:* We worked with [the students from the NPO] through the financial aid process [and] sponsor[ed] a visit for them and a parent. We do some special orientation, retention programs with them and the like… [this] is an articulated partnership.

*Interviewer:* [You mean] you have spots set aside for those kids?

*Interviewee:* We do, it probably has more implication on the financial aid component. Obviously retention, [and] we definitely looked a lot more closely through the admissions review process.

*Interviewer:* You look more closely at students from [this organization], wait, so explain that to me?

*Interviewee:* For example, the first year the parameter [for admission in the contract] was a 3.0 GPA and a [combined score of one] thousand [on the SAT] critical reading and mathematics [sections]. However with it being the first year of the partnership there were a couple of students that fell slightly below those parameters. However given that it was a partnership agreement we definitely gave them, I’d say, some extra consideration throughout the admissions process.
Knowing we want to foster and nurture that relationship so we actually went a little below the parameters that we established. We optimally feel those students were a good fit [for the institution]. (Dominic, HEI A)

As the Assistant Director described this contractual relationship, its value went beyond what it could provide the institution in the context of a single year long, admission cycle. The relative importance of “fostering and nurturing” this relationship for the long term overrode the importance of adhering to strict contractual obligations (i.e., testing requirements). Similarly, in the prior passage, the importance of “working with these organizations as a partnership” – and thus making a last-minute exception for a student affiliated with the NPO – took precedence over procedures (and timelines) to which the institution typically adhered.

Outside of formal contracts and MOUs, interactions between HEIs and NPOs added some flexibility to the admissions process. An HEI with a strictly quantitative testing-and-GPA-based admissions process described how students that met the minimum criteria for admission might move off the waitlist and into the admitted class after an intervention from a community group or NPO:

It’s those students that are in the middle [academically] that we wait on and we contact the students and we work with the students…oftentimes counselors will call or staff from the community groups will call [to advocate for a student’s admission]. That does help because then I can take that information and go talk to our admissions committee whenever we’re making decisions and advocate for the students that may fall below the GPA or SAT scores that are right in the middle of being eligible and would be quality students. (Elizabeth, HEI V)

The relationship that the HEI had built with counselors and NPO staff gave the HEI access to information that could be used to make admission decisions. This
relationship provides a perceived advantage for the NPO’s students as well as for the HEI. The relationship essentially de-risks students by providing additional information on their fitness for admission as well as their likelihood to persist beyond the first year. And it enlarges the pool of viable applicants, giving HEIs a larger number of students among which to choose.

Informal relationships. The majority of HEIs in the study did not have contracts or MOUs with identified nonprofits. Of the 18 institutions with relationships of some kind, 11 had only relationships that were not codified in a contract or MOU. While it was the case that all relationships with contracts or MOUs constituted formal relationships, informal relationships were more difficult to define for respondents. In a representative comment, one Multicultural Recruiter at a moderately selective, private suburban HEI described a program in Philadelphia that she worked with “a lot,” and described her institution’s contact with the organization in this way:

That’s more of a, just whenever they contact me it’s just like I put them on priority. It’s not a formal partnership that we have. You know what I mean? I mean, it is. We talk about them as a partner, but it’s not, it’s more of a[n] informal, they help me complete applications. I bring ‘em on campus. They pay for the food. We just tour them. We do a little extra if we have to, like a special presentation if we have to. (Amanda, HEI C)

This speaker did not elucidate her thinking further on why this relationship was a formal one, but it is suggestive of general difficulty of defining the parameters of informal relationships.

For the great majority of HEIs even cursory, once-yearly contact between a nonprofit and the HEI amounted to what they considered a relationship. As one HEI put it in a representative comment, “As far as anyone [or any groups] that contacts the campus
that wants to take the campus tour and have [an] admissions presentation…we accommodate anybody and everybody.” (Maria, HEI Y) Almost all HEIs mentioned that their offerings to NPOs included paying for a bus trip to campus and lunch, giving out folders of information, and offering staff or faculty to speak to the group. The contact sometimes extended to incentivizing students to apply by offering them scholarship money (e.g., HEI J, a moderately selective, private, suburban HEI) or showing students from diverse backgrounds that the HEI is also diverse by having current undergraduates address the group (e.g., HEI E, a moderately selective, private, city HEI). One interviewee from a moderately selective, private, suburban HEI described these activities stating:

Two of the most prominent things that we do is, one, we house a bus tour so students can sign up to pick up a bus at their school and come visit campus for a day. That’s an opportunity for them to come see it firsthand. We also have a—it’s not anything that we necessarily partner directly with [a scholarship organization], but we offer to those students—if [the] student chooses to attend HEI J, we will match their…scholarship. (Justin, HEI J)

Said a Director at another moderately selective, private, urban HEI,

Really, for us, it’s just getting them on campus for a tour, and giving them lunch, and having a presentation by a faculty member. That’s really the extent of what we do with them. (Bill, HEI Q)

HEIs saw visits by NPOs to their campuses as an important mechanism to sparking interest in students’ mind about higher education in general.

Some HEIs with informal relationships made an effort to connect with NPOs more frequently than just once a year. These HEIs offered students of NPOs regular workshops on college-related topics, as well as general college exposure through campus
visits. These activities were often treated as a service the HEIs offered to NPOs. An Assistant Director explained that she often reached out several times per year to the ten or so organizations she worked with:

Largely the primary way that we work with all of these organizations is through campus visits and then follow up throughout the year if they need an additional workshop or you want to follow up on the application status of a student. That’s primarily what we do right now from the admission standpoint. (Elizabeth, HEI V)

One HEI that maintained a particularly broad array of informal and formal relationships articulated that the purpose of its ties to NPOs, however informal, was to provide a service to those organizations: “We still look at what the organization wants to accomplish and then we figure out whether we can help them with that” (Betsy, HEI H).

A sense of wanting to provide the NPOs with “a menu of services” (Amanda, HEI C) was echoed across institutions, but more than this was the sense that HEIs were providing a service to the community at large. These services were described as multidimensional, from generating college awareness and contributing to students’ personal growth, to financial support or sponsorship of NPOs. The Director of Admissions at a moderately selective private institution noted that while the yield from certain relationships might be low, they were sometimes involved “for political reasons” and sometimes “for the greater good.” He said of one program,

*Interviewee:* [S]ince we’ve been involved with that program, I have not seen increases in enrollment necessarily. I don’t think we really went into it with the idea that we would be increasing enrollment because of it. I think it was just an opportunity for us to have the opportunity to participate and to provide access to students if they needed it.

*Interviewer:* That seems like a lot of effort to participate in the programming at that [Pact Foundation] does, and to agree to
go to fairs and do things that they may ask you and call upon you to do as sort of member organization or member institution. It seems like a lot of work to not have a return on it.

Interviewee: Yeah, there are a number of things that we do in terms of our recruitment efforts and outreach efforts that tend to have low impacts…and perhaps, low ROI, but that we are involved in, one, for, I mean sometimes for political reasons, but other times, for the greater good. (Albert, HEI Y)

Another HEI painted a picture of a series of very informal relationships where the aim was simply to interact with as many students as possible, recruiting students but also supporting those students’ growth.

It’s very informal. We don’t have contracts…It’s just more so working with the organization for the overall goal of college access and college awareness. The more students that we bring to campus is the more students that we’re able to interact with, the better for not only recruitment, but for their personal growth and college access and college—and awareness. We don’t have any fees, we don’t have any contracts. If [NPOs] invite us to an event or anything then we will—like typically we provide sponsorship for the organization. A couple months ago there was an organization called Pearl Fund and they had an event and asked for sponsorship and we sponsored the event. It’s very informal. If an organization wants to work with us, then we work with them as long as their primary goal is to—just college access and awareness. (Elizabeth, HEI V)

The Director of Admission at another HEI described that it had relationships with nonprofits in order “to help show them that we are a school that is there to reach out to them, and help their students succeed” (Bill, HEI Q).

A Coordinator of Multicultural Recruitment at an HEI with a strongly Christian mission told me about his institution’s involvement with a local nonprofit that does not serve students directly, but is more of an information sharing body for local leaders of organizations that cater to the community, including students and recent graduates:
Interviewee: We’ll come together and talk about the issues that are plaguing Harrisburg and talk about the issues that our teens are faced with here in the city.

Interviewer: Okay. How is that related to your admissions work specifically?

Interviewee: The reason why I joined this is twofold. Obviously one, for me it’s important to give back to the community that I’m in. But number two, I believe all colleges—but specifically [us], since we’re a Christian college—even more so, we need to create a posture of service, a posture of just giving access for these students to really explore what college means. I [help] college students to think through, or talk to, “What would it look like, Adam, to be at Penn State or the local community college or at HEI R or at another private institution?” What I’ve seen actually is that my relationships have actually benefitted the reputation of HEI R in the community, which, in the long term, will help with recruitment. It might not impact me directly because it might take five to ten years where we really build this relationship and people really trust us in the community, but they’ll start sending their students here. I believe that creating this pipeline or creating this posture of service which is really important is gonna be vital in enrollment.

(Adam, HEI R)

These informal relationships were seen as a service to NPOs and students in the community. But, these relationships were also believed to have potential to enhance the HEI’s recruitment efforts in the long term. Informal relationships seemed to have no particular set of expectations built around them or into them; most concretely, they lacked MOUs or contracts. Informal relationships were characterized by a general responsiveness to NPOs’ requests (none of my respondents indicated that any NPO had made unreasonable requests); a willingness to spend a bit of money for lunch or the bus ride to campus; fairly infrequent contact, perhaps once a year; and generally warm interpersonal relations between individuals at the HEI and NPO.
Interpersonal Relationships Are Constitutive and Catalytic

An emphasis on relational trust and interpersonal relationships as the basis for organizational relationships between HEIs and NPOs was a prominent theme across all HEIs, regardless of the degree of relationship formality. Interpersonal relationships were not only viewed as constitutive of inter-organizational relationships, but were also catalysts to inter-organizational relationships. Networks and pre-existing personal connections served to engender new relationships. Changes in leadership often engendered new policies and practices. Furthermore, there was evidence that these interpersonal relationships could translate into direct benefits for students.

Networks and connections. Numerous HEIs identified the influence of networks and connections in identifying and maintaining connections between NPOs and HEIs. Recommendations from incoming high-level administrators, Boards of Trustees, and influential alumni and faculty, all served as catalysts for considering potential new relationships. The president of a moderately selective, private, suburban HEI described how he hired a new staff member to establish partnerships with nonprofits because her most recent position had been at nonprofits of the kind he sought to partner with.

Interviewee: What we did was from day one in setting up a kind of new shop and new office I hired dedicated multicultural recruiters. I hired multicultural partnership [staff member], a person who was dedicated, who had experience, who had formerly worked with [a host of Hispanic-focused entities]…I can go and on and on, different organizations.

Interviewer: You hired her for her connections, to an extent?

Interviewee: Exactly. (Dr. Tim, HEI C)
The staff member he was referring was another interviewee in this study. This individual corroborated the president’s statement, noting, “They tweaked my position to be a multicultural recruiter of partnerships with the strategy of identifying potential partners, in the Hispanic community particularly” (Amanda, HEI C). She believed that her hiring had a lot to do with the fact that her interviewer, who had known her in her prior positions, “knew the type of work and the type of linkages I had” to Hispanic-serving organizations (Amanda, HEI C). In response to the question of how his HEI intended to identify NPOs with which to form relationships, one Director at a moderately selective private HEI mentioned how the connections of former staff members added a valuable network of NPO connections to his institution’s tool belt. He said that the former director of Multicultural Services “has bounced around” to various jobs, but he is a member of many different organizations, and has an extreme, wide network, different community based organizations, from educational to…his whole mission, I mean everything he does is about college access and getting more and more students to school. [We’re j]ust utilizing the network that we have. (Matt, HEI U)

In a variation on this theme, the president of a moderately selective private HEI described how he had been involved in the establishment of contractual partnerships with charter school networks and a Hispanic-serving nonprofit while at his previous HEI. He had worked closely with these entities and came to admire the work they did. He then forged contracts with those same charter networks when he moved to a new HEI as president (President Brian, HEI P). An Associate Director of Admission at HEI P told me proudly, “He called them, I think, within three days of [attaining] his presidency [laughter] and asked them to put together MOUs” (Jean, HEI P). The president also
stated that his warm personal relationship with a mentor at a Hispanic-serving nonprofit had led to a formal relationship. In his words, previously the organization “had had only relationships. After extended dialogue with me, they decided to form a partnership with [us]. So we were actually their first partner” (President Brian, HEI P).

One Director of Admission described how some of his HEIs’ relationships were initiated based on an awareness that “this organization is somebody we know is doing good work, or we’ve heard has done good work—so we’ll engage with them so that they see that that’s where our goal is too, is to do good work” (HEI X, a moderately selective, private, urban HEI). The speaker mentioned initiating a relationship based not only on direct personal knowledge, but also indirect knowledge through a trusted (though unnamed) source, further cementing the finding that personal ties matter, even loose or distant ones, in catalyzing institutional relationships. Another participant, when asked whether it was accurate to describe his institution’s relationships as informal, responded, “Yeah, it’s mainly about—you know, it’s interesting. I would say it’s more about dialogue and keeping people informed and working on partnerships like that” (HEI L, a private, urban HEI, selectivity not available).

Matt, the Director of Admission at a moderately selective private HEI described using his HEI’s network of Trustees not only to identify possible partner organizations, but also to facilitate initial contacts between the HEI and NPOs. He said,

We are taking advantage of current relationships that we already have, and we using our network to identify, and that network comes from the entire way, from the Board of Trustees down. I gave a presentation couple months ago to the Board of Trustees on just some of the strategies that we use in enrollment…some of the strategies were talking about how we’re trying to increase our diversity with underrepresented students, geographic
diversity. They all had different suggestions, and they are all very successful, professional people. We have CEOs and presidents, and former ambassadors to the United States of America. It was very daunting to give a speech in front of them. They were able to say, “Let me reach out to my contacts here, let me reach out to my contacts here.” That’s where we’ve started. (Matt, HEI U)

Not only was the Board giving suggestions, but they were also actively reaching out to the entities with which they were connected in order to forge further connections.

An Assistant Director at another institution told the story of speaking to an audience of students and parents at a Jack and Jill conference on preparing for college as a person of color. Unbeknownst to him there was a Trustee from his institution in the audience. This person being both a Trustee and a member of the organization really “helped in terms of [cementing the idea that], ‘We need to have a relationship with Jack and Jill.’” He went on,

It wasn’t just me, so I think it really does come from—as much as I’d love to take full credit for HEI G wanting this [to form a relationship with this organization for people of color]—I think it does come from the top, where you had trustees that are saying, “We need to be there. We need to make sure HEI G is at the table.” (Anthony, HEI G)

One president of a moderately selective private HEI, who had initiated many new contractual partnerships, said that he, rather than trustees at his institution, had been the catalyst. He said,

[T]he strategy that I brought to the table represented a pretty dramatic change for [my institution], particularly trustees. I would say particularly trustees. It’s not like they were resistant. It was just that this was new to them. (President Brian, HEI P)

At some institutions the president is doing the driving, while at others the trustees may be doing it. These findings point up the importance of having not only goals and
plans, but also of having leaders at numerous levels of management who possess an
interest or even a passion for the attainment of those goals.

Connections through influential groups and individuals also had their drawbacks,
however. A Senior Assistant Director of Admissions at a highly selective private HEI
related how he received suggestions from members of the HEI’s community that he then
researched and assessed for potential partnerships:

Trustees, faculty members, will send us things from time to time and I’ll
do some research and give my recommendations as to whether or not I
feel like this could be a good partnership. Then we’ll receive emails from
some list that they include us on and again we’ll do some research to
deceive yes or no. It still kind of comes again top-down connections that we
meet and travel, things that are recommended to us by various faculty and
staff with a college. (Dominic, HEI A)

After acknowledging the importance of connections, however, this individual
went on to describe how personal connections can be a double-edged sword of sorts. He
described how his HEI had formed a relationship with a nonprofit that was started by an
alumnus who had been a Trustee at one point, only to find that the institution was unable
to extricate itself from the relationship precisely because of this individual’s outsized
influence.

There is one organization that we work with and despite the financial
component, despite the counseling, despite all the services [they receive
through our association], they’re still not retaining at a rate we would like
to. We actually are in the process of reevaluating some of the conditions of
that agreement. (Dominic, HEI A)

Despite it being a relatively ineffectual arrangement for the HEI, particularly with respect
to student retention, the pre-existing connection made it harder to end the relationship.
Alumni connections also emerged as important stimulants of relationships. The Director of Recruitment at an HEI without formal ties described how NPO staff that happened to be alumni of his institution served almost as satellite admissions officers, encouraging students affiliated with their NPO to go to college, but also to consider particular HEIs. He said,

They know that we have an interest and a desire to be interacting with the students that they’re working with and encouraging them to pursue four-year institutions, including [our institution]. (Justin, HEI J)

A Multicultural Recruiter at one HEI commented that an influential alumnus’ connection to a charter school was the catalyst for the institution forging a connection. She explained that this individual “is very much involved in that organization so we’re very much involved in that organization” (Betsy, HEI H). One highly selective private institution with a religious affiliation noted that during recruitment it often connected with potential applicants by working through alumni in local church parishes (Adam, HEI R).

**Changes in leadership.** Among study HEIs, seven explicitly cited changes in leadership in the form of a new Dean or President as the catalyst to new access and diversity efforts. The role of institutional leadership is perhaps most evident when there is a change. These actions included seeking out and executing contractual partnerships, increased receptivity to relationships, and creating new practices.

A Director at a moderately selective private HEI that had maintained relationships for more than 10 years noted that the previous president had been “very intentional” in making efforts on the diversity front. She attributed her institution’s relatively long
history of having partnerships to his intentionality and his long tenure (Betsy, HEI H).

The Director at a different moderately selective private HEI pointed to a new practice of tracking students’ affiliation with a particular nonprofit, and attributed this to “the directive of the new president” (Matt, HEI U).

A Director with 12 years of experience at his institution explained the importance of the leader – in this case, the Dean of Admission – having a “passion for access” in enacting a diversity and access agenda. In a representative quote, he explained that with the former Dean,

*Interviewee*: …there wasn’t a whole lot in the way of, “Oh, you definitely have to make sure that this [relationship] continues to say strong.” There wasn’t as much of a directive there.

*Interviewer*: There is more of a directive now?

*Interviewee*: Absolutely.

*Interviewer*: That’s just sort of the changing of the guard at the top?

*Interviewee*: From a big picture definitely a changing of guard at the top. Our new dean also has I would say an emphasis or a passion for access and that’s a big reason why we have the articulated partnership with [this charter school]. (Dominic, HEI A)

The new Dean’s personal passion was viewed by the Director, who had to execute on the passion, as critical to driving the diversity agenda higher on the list of office priorities and ensuring attention was paid to the work of making partnerships happen. It implies that goal setting and strategic plans will not make the work happen if there is an absence of interest or will on the part of people in positions of leadership.
**Benefits of relationships to students.** Strong personal relationships, or at least regular contact between HEI and NPO staff, also appeared to have potential to directly benefit students in the admissions process. In a representative anecdote, an Assistant Director at a highly selective private HEI explained the perceived importance of trust and regular contact with NPOs to his efforts to reach diverse populations of students. He went on to talk a little bit about how exactly he accomplished this with formal partners:

…you really do wanna keep those relationships [with NPOs] strong. For example, for my Diversity weekend, I almost always will send out my first invites to some of these organizations [we have contracts with], saying, “Hey, do you have any kids that you want to refer for this program?” If they have kids that do apply, yeah, we make sure that we can be accommodating to those organizations. Obviously, within reason. Most of the time they send me a good quality kid. Then, of course, a kid that is really seriously looking at [my institution]…There is a trust level that has been built between you and the organization. I think we really do operate where we want to keep that relationship going. Of course, that translates over into the application. Same thing. You want to do your very best to accommodate when an organization has sent you a[n applicant that is a] good fit. (Anthony, HEI G)

The HEI, at least partly in the interest of “keep[ing] that relationship going,” might be willing to “accommodate” (i.e., admit) students associated with this program, over and above similar but unaffiliated students.

The role that even glancing contact between NPO and HEI can play in helping a student gain admission to an institution was explained by the Multicultural Recruiter for Partnerships at a moderately selective private institution with numerous relationships. She explained how her relationships with individuals at NPOs were more effective than those with school counselors – even though both had the same information pertaining to a
given student – simply because she could actually get hold of a person when she called the NPO.

*Interviewee:* [M]ost of those organizations have FERPA [privacy] release forms from the kids [therefore] [w]e’re able to discuss with them whatever [about the student].

*Interviewer:* Would you go to them [the NPOs] over their [school] counselor? If you knew that they…

*Interviewee:* Oh, yeah.

*Interviewer:* You would? Tell me about that. Why would you do that?

*Interviewee:* Well, I mean, because if they already have a, let’s say they already have a file for the kid that has all of their letters of recommendation. All of their copies of transcripts and stuff like that. We can get it directly from them.

*Interviewer:* Wouldn’t their high school counselor have that, too?

*Interviewee:* Some counselors, especially in Philadelphia? Not that they don’t have access to that. It’s that they’re just so overwhelmed. They don’t call you back. They don’t respond to your emails. (Amanda, HEI C)

In essence, Amanda was describing how it wasn’t actually possible to form a relationship with a school counselor. These passages not only illustrate how relationships benefit NPOs (e.g., they may get early notification of events) and HEIs, but also suggest how these warm relationships can directly benefit students over the course of the admissions cycle, from recruitment to special invitations to events, to admission.

**Perceived Costs of Relationships with NPOs**

Representatives of study HEIs articulated that there were costs to relationships with NPOs, regardless of whether relationships were formal or informal in nature. Both formal and informal relationships generally required the HEI to invest a variety of
resources, most notably money, time, and effort or a combination thereof. Some costs were paid directly to nonprofits, and could serve as a subscription fee (e.g., QuestBridge) or membership fee (e.g., NACAC, Meet the MAC). Other costs were indirect and could include, for instance, an HEI’s commitment to meet all demonstrated financial need for students affiliated with a certain NPO, even though this may deviate from the institution’s general financial aid policy for students not affiliated with the partner NPO (e.g., HEI P).

In a representative quote, the Assistant Director of Multicultural Recruitment at a highly selective private HEI with a number of partnerships told me his institution was

> [h]aving lots of conversations with development, [and] there’s a capital campaign taking place to grow our endowment by about 200 million offset the cost of enrolling these students and I would say more than enrolling, retaining and graduating these students. It is definitely a conversation that’s taking place. (Dominic, HEI A)

Most common were the indirect costs associated with the commitment to simply interact with nonprofits at the most basic level. These included the cost of travel, hotel, meals and perhaps a registration fee to attend an organization’s college fair, or the costs of bring students to campus for a day, which could include paying for a bus, for lunch on campus, or for providing students with school-branded gear (e.g., folders, pennants, t-shirts). One Enrollment Manager of an inclusive public HEI said,

> I’ll be honest with you. It’s simply because—at least here at our institution? Funds are tight. There are some groups who—we're pretty used to them contacting us; we plan. We budget for the meals or whatever for the group. Without us being able to completely provide transportation, and the meals or overnight accommodations we haven’t offered that much recently. Where we say, “Hey! We'd love to have a group from your school!” I wish we could do that. I wish we could do it over and over. Like I said, just simply because of budget, we haven’t done a lot of outreach like that. (Meredith, HEI F)
She went on to describe about how one of her admission officers had written a grant to fund summer outreach program for “urban, multicultural” kids, and stressed how successful it had been, particularly in terms of student enrollment (75% of the group, she noted) and retention (they were all current juniors at the HEI). In the face of this success, she seemed to say, it was lamentable that she could not bring students to campus, indicating that her HEI could not spend the money on transportation, among other things.

Every HEI, whether it maintained formal relationships or not, was aware – and sometimes also wary – of the direct and indirect costs of maintaining relationships with NPOs.

The financial costs of relationships with NPOs have assumed an outsized role in some HEIs’ perceptions. The seven institutions that did not maintain relationships made references to the presumed costs of partnerships, which were usually framed as financial, rather than as outlays of staff time and effort. These presumptions guided the decision to not form relationships. Two HEIs – one a highly selective private, the other an inclusive public – that did not maintain contracts, MOUs, or relationships of any kind with NPOs specifically cited financial constraints as the reason for not pursuing these arrangements (HEI F, HEI I). The Enrollment Manager at the inclusive public HEI attributed her institution’s lack of partnerships almost entirely to a lack of funding, saying,

Like I said, to my knowledge, it really, truly is the funding [that keeps us from these relationships]…If we could bring groups here, if we could provide transportation for students in an urban area, why wouldn’t we do that?...I feel like we would love to serve that—serve any kind of population. Bring them onto our campus, and expose them to the opportunities. A lot of times we are limited by funds. (Meredith, HEI F)
Nonetheless, it was relatively unclear what costs the institutions perceived. In some cases, the cost they saw as untenable was the price to be in a partnership, that is, the subscription fee or charge. I asked a Vice President of Enrollment at a highly selective, private, suburban HEI why he thought his institution was not participating in relationships with NPOs and he responded that it was, “not for lack of trying,” but for us to be able to keep the lights on, keep the buildings heated, that sort of thing, we have certain costs that need to be met. Even if we took that down to the very minimum of what costs need to be covered, we haven’t been able to find a partner that has been able to work with us. (Peter, HEI I)

I failed to ask him what organizations or potential partners his HEI had investigated, so I could not investigate whether his assumption of financial cost was correct. It is possible that he was referring to the costs the HEI would have to cover for students that had been admitted through a partnership. As described earlier in this chapter, some contractual arrangements (e.g., HEI P, HEI G) required that HEIs support partnership students with more substantial financial aid packages than the usual calculations would generally afford.

Some institutions considered the costs of supporting students whom they presumed would require financial aid as too great to warrant forming relationships. In addition to these direct costs, interviewees also described indirect costs that they presumed they would incur, should relationships lead to increases in low-income, first-generation and/or URM students. For instance, some interviewees alluded to the challenges of paying for less affluent students to attend institutions in an environment
where there are many competing causes vying for limited institutional funding. One Director of Admission at a small, inclusive, private HEI described how:

colleges…are in a boat where we’re being asked to do more with less. Recruit more students, higher quality, giving them less money to make a higher profit. It’s unfortunate, but it’s a fact. That leaves people in positions of leadership at these institutions to have to make difficult decisions about what they invest their time and resources into. Unfortunately, those type of feel-good things, quote unquote feel-good, take a back seat. (Sarah, HEI B)

In essence, this representative was saying that there was little point to spending money or effort on establishing and cultivating relationships that would yield students who could not contribute to the institution’s financial health.

One admission staff member at a moderately selective private HEI who handled the development and day-to-day administration of relationships with NPOs as well as for-profit entities believed that “true partnership” was signified when “some money [was] exchanged” (Amanda, HEI C). But this was not a view that was widely expressed.

Setting aside the difficulty of distinguishing between “relationship” and “partnership” described earlier in the chapter, almost all study HEIs appeared to subscribe to the view that relationships that did not require the exchange of funds were still relationships.

**HEIs’ Goals For Access and Diversity**

This section identifies and describes institutional goals and themes articulated in the 22 institutional strategic planning documents available online and interviews with HEI presidents and admissions professionals. Most institutions in the study (22 of 25) publically shared their planning documents. There was notable range and variation in the level of detail presented in the plans, as well as the degree to which concrete goals were
expressed. Interviews provided much-needed detail to understand how goals that had not been clearly articulated in strategic planning documents were understood and executed. The three most commonly mentioned college access and diversity goals mentioned across these sources were increasing overall student enrollment, increasing the diversity of the student body, and better addressing the needs of low-income students/Pell grant recipients, particularly with respect to increasing graduation rates and improving financial assistance to this group.

**Increase enrollment.** Fifteen of the 25 institutions indicated a goal to increase overall student enrollment, but not all institutions expressed this goal in both strategic planning documents and interviews. Nine institutions indicated a clear desire to increase enrollment in both their strategic plans and conversations; representatives of an additional six HEIs expressed this same interest in interviews but not in strategic planning documents. The general interest in increasing enrollment is expressed in the following representative comment from the planning document of an inclusive, private, suburban HEI:

*Strategy IV – Achieve healthy enrollment.*

To achieve this strategy we will pursue the following initiatives:

1) Strengthen the enrollment by creating and implementing a strategic enrollment management plan for undergraduate students. (HEI M, strategic plan)

Planned and in-use strategies to drive the increased enrollment goal varied widely across the 15 institutions that stated a goal of increasing enrollment. The most common strategies that were mentioned included increasing recruitment of more full-paying students; increasing the number of international students (with the implication that these students would be full-pay); adding Master’s or other programs; growing online
offerings; and recruiting from further outside the HEI’s traditional stronghold region or regions. Less frequently mentioned strategies included pursuing formal partnerships and strengthening articulation with two-year colleges. As an example, one moderately selective, private, suburban HEI listed in its planning document the following specific enrollment targets:

A. Total enrollment – By fall 2018 HEI U will enroll a total of 7,000 students in all market segments; 4,000 of those students will be traditional full-time undergraduates.

B. Geographic diversity. Counter anticipated college-age population declines in [our] primary market area by increasing the geographical diversity of the student body.

C. Female students – Increase the percentage of female students to 50% or more of undergraduate enrollment.

D. International students – Increase the number of international students to 10% of total enrollment.

E. Minority students. Increase the number of minority students at HEI U to 20% of total enrollment.

F. The freshman class. Recruit a freshman class with strong academic credentials (average verbal+math SAT score of 1,100)

G. Graduate programs. Offer academically strong, market-driven masters and doctoral programs that produce highly qualified professionals for the 21st Century.

H. Online/market segment - Online enrollment will be a major contributor toward attainment of a total enrollment of 7,000 total students by 2018. (HEI U, Strategic Plan)

These goals were also articulated by this institution’s Director of Admission, who indicated that he had the strategic plan in front of him as we spoke on the phone. Another moderately selective private city institution’s specific numerical goals echoed those listed above, but also included the addition of a focus on increased transfer numbers. This institution’s strategic plan indicated the HEI’s aims to

- Grow the undergraduate first-year class to 650 students by 2020, recruiting over 30% of these students from outside the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- Grow out [sic] international student market to 10% of the undergraduate first-year class as a way to diversify out campus and reduce out reliance on mature recruiting markets
- Develop strong articulation agreements with four Pennsylvania two-year colleges to grow new transfer students to 300 per year and build a support structure that assures readiness (HEI X, Strategic plan)

Only six HEIs listed specific, measurable numerical goals in strategic plans along the lines of the two HEIs quoted above. Numerical goals commonly included attention to a variety of segments of the student population, such as those described above, including traditional full-time undergraduates as well as female, international, and minority students. All six of these institutions stated a goal of expanding the geographic reach, including internationally, as a way to increase overall enrollment.

One moderately selective, public HEI’s goals, though not numerical in nature, illustrate the range of goals institutions were pursuing with respect to enrollment:

- Increase FTFT (“first-time full-time”) FR domestic student enrollment
- Increase out-of-state FTFT FT domestic student enrollment
- Increase FT & PT [part-time] transfer student domestic enrollment
- Increase FT & PT traditional and online graduate student domestic enrollment
- Increase international student enrollment
- Improve quality of ALL entering students
- Increase diversity of incoming student body
- Increase online enrollments (undergraduate & graduate – adult & veteran students) (HEI V, strategic plan)

Of the 15 HEIs that indicated a desire to increase enrollment, none of them indicated that they were pursuing only one strategy to attain this goal.

Diversity. In strategic planning documents, 17 HEIs mentioned diversity as a general construct, framing it as an asset or as an element important to the institutions.
One representative of a highly selective, private, suburban HEI that maintained no relationships noted that its aim with regard to diversity was:

> Build upon the college’s commitment to inclusive excellence in order to increase diversity among students, faculty and staff to enhance learning opportunities that are multicultural, inclusive, and accessible to all students (HEI I, strategic plan).

The goal of increasing the diversity of the student population was found in only 10 of these 17 institutions’ planning documents, however. Four of the 17 institutions that mentioned diversity in their strategic plans but did not specifically state a desire to increase the diversity of the student population did expressly mention – in interviews – a desire to increase the enrollment of diverse students. Six of these 17 HEIs mentioned partnerships as a mechanism to address diversity.

According to its strategic plan, one moderately selective, private HEI planned to “deploy relationship-based enrollment strategies designed to recruit students who are likely to persist to graduation” (HEI U, strategic plan), which was corroborated by my conversation with that HEI’s Director of Admission, who indicated that community-based organizations were important to the recruitment of URM students.

There’s different strategies in place that we’re using in all three of those areas for increasing female enrollment, increasing geographical diversity, increasing the underrepresented students. Part of joining with or identifying community-based organizations seems to be a way to…a strategy to help increase the number of underrepresented students on campus. (Matt, HEI U)

In planning documents, two private institutions, both of which maintained relationships with nonprofits, specifically mentioned relationships with NPOs, CBOs and/or charter schools as a means to realize the goal of achieving a student body
reflecting the diversity of the college-age population in the United States. Both institutions also indicated in conversations that they had initiated and maintained contract and MOU-based relationships with charter schools/networks and/or nonprofits.

In its strategic plan, one of the private, highly selective, urban HEIs described the function of CBOs as “identify[ing] students in under-served high schools with the skills and desire for success in a highly selective college setting” and noted that working with these organizations could “broaden diversity in terms of both students of color and socioeconomic background” (HEI G, strategic plan). For the other institution, a moderately selective, private, urban HEI, relationships with charter school were specifically linked to an enhanced ability to “recruit high performing students from urban areas and disadvantaged populations” (HEI P, strategic plan). These two institutions were the only ones in the study that mentioned in both planning documents and interviews that relationships – specifically those with nonprofits – had a direct role to play in the recruitment of diverse populations.

Five institutions listed measurable numerical goals for increasing the percentage of URM students on their campuses in planning documents, but they framed these specific goals in different ways. Three of these institutions and the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) system expressed diversity goals as raw percentages of the overall student body. Two institutions described their enrollment goals around diversity and inclusion as being “to more closely reflect regional population demographics” (HEI H, strategic plan) or, even more specifically, to mirror the percentages of students graduating from Pennsylvania high schools (HEI X, strategic
plan). Far more common than numerical goals or percentages were general statements such as, “We will commit to increase diversity in all its forms” (HEI E, strategic plan), a phrase sisterly in its vagueness to the “healthy enrollment” goal articulated above. Eleven institutions made references in strategic plans to the importance of diversity among faculty and staff. Five HEIs included international students as part of diversity and four institutions made specific reference to “minorities.”

Though “diversity” was mentioned in 17 of 22 plans, explicit definitions or even discussions of what constitutes diversity were largely absent from strategic planning documents. Across HEIs, a range of characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, gender identity and sexual orientation, ability, international and/or undocumented status, and/or geography, were mentioned as areas where the HEI would like to increase enrollment, but not all these characteristics were mentioned in every institution’s planning documents. Furthermore, not all factors were mentioned in both planning documents and interviews with HEI representatives. These findings indicate there may be differences between institutions’ philosophical and operational definitions of diversity. They also suggest that diversity may be defined differently at different campuses, and that the concept of diversity may be emergent and evolving.

Only one institution explicitly stated – in planning documents or otherwise – that diversity is situational, in essence that it is unique to each campus. In interviews, however, the idea that diversity is defined differently at different campus – and that it may even be an evolving concept – was fairly common. In conversation and strategic planning documents, one moderately selective, private, suburban HEI’s institution-
specific definition of diversity included “underrepresented students,” as well as women and people from underrepresented geographic areas under the banner of “diversity” (HEI U, strategic plan; Matt, HEI U). The Director Admission of this HEI recited the same numerical goals as in its strategic plan but also noted that it was hard to pin down exactly what his institution meant by “diversity.”

“Everybody can identify or classify diversity in different ways…It’s not very clear in the [strategic] plans, but it’s become more clear through meetings and conversations that they are looking to increase the number of underrepresented students on campus. Then a side note on that is that we’re also looking to increase our female enrollment as a separate goal. Another goal that falls under that besides female enrollment is they also want to increase the geographic diversity…to grow outside of the predominant area around [our campus]. There’s different strategies in place that we’re using in all three of those areas for increasing female enrollment, increasing geographical diversity, increasing the underrepresented students. Part of joining with or identifying community-based organizations seems to be a way to, a strategy to help increase the number of underrepresented students on campus. (Matt, HEI U)

It was relatively common to find discrepancies between what strategic plans and interviewees stated. This difference is at least partly due to the range of detail present in publically available strategic plans, but also supports the idea that definitions of what is diverse are not only institution specific, but also evolving and perhaps are understood and operationalized differently by individuals within a single organization. At one moderately selective, private, suburban institution where I had access to a strategic plan and spoke to both the Director of Admission and an Associate Director, the strategic plan called for increased “international, minority and athlete recruitment” (HEI Y, strategic plan). In conversation, the Associate Director was more expansive, including additional populations under “diversity” that had not been mentioned in the plan:
One of the goals is more diversity…in all aspects, not just race, but religion, [distorted audio 13:11], LGBT. We’re definitely an inclusive campus, but they’d like to have international students as well. As far as initiatives that are in place, I mean some things take money. Now, we don't have the special kind of scholarships for any of those populations.

(Maria, HEI Y)

The HEI’s Director of Admission’s comments were somewhat contradictory, suggesting that there were no particular goals for “a particular population or student type” when it came to “inclusivity and diversity on campus.” Rather, there was “a hope” that Admissions would keep elements of human diversity in mind in the recruitment process:

We are pretty, I mean our diversity here on campus is pretty strong, and so, I don't think that that is a…I've worked with institutions where the only students of color on campus were the basketball teams, and that kind of thing. HEI Y is definitely not an institution like that. We have a lot of diversity not only of race, but also of socioeconomic background, religious backgrounds, everything you can think of…[T]here's no overt expectation to improve in any particular population or area, but it is a hope of the institution or an expectation of the institution that that is always part of what we do. (Albert, HEI Y)

Another HEI’s strategic plan noted that “there are segments of the Jewish student population whom we have not reached” (HEI G, strategic plan), but this group was not specifically mentioned in my conversation with the Assistant Director (Anthony, HEI G).

At a moderately selective private urban institution with numerous relationships of many levels of formality, a conversation with an Associate Director indicated that undocumented students were included under the definition of diversity and that a partnership existed to recruit these students (Jean, HEI P). The same institution’s strategic plan, however, did not mention this group of students (HEI P, strategic plan).
A single higher education institution (a highly selective, private, urban HEI with relationships) not only provided a definition of diversity, but also had a strategic plan devoted exclusively to diversity. This HEI defined diversity as follows:

A broad and evolving concept defined as the presence and participation of people who differ. This includes primary characteristics such as physical traits (like skin complexion, hair texture, shape of eyes, nose and lips), biological sex, gender, ethnicity, mental and physical abilities, and sexual orientation; as well as secondary characteristics such as education level, income bracket, religious affiliation, work experience, language skills, nationality or country of origin, and family status. Simply put, diversity refers to all of the characteristics that make individuals different from each other. At [this institution], this definition is to be understood against a lack of compositional diversity from historically marginalized groups within our campus community. (HEI R, Strategic Plan)

I cite this definition not because it is the only one given among the available strategic plans, but rather because it comprehensively captures the working definitions implicit in virtually all the other plans as well as my conversations, primarily that diversity is (or can be) specific to individual institutions.

**Value of diversity.** References to the value and benefits of diversity were generally implicit rather than baldly stated in conversations and planning documents. In strategic plans, only five institutions made explicit references to the value of diversity in enhancing the HEI. Most of these were related to a perception that experiencing diversity enhances learning. For one institution, diversity had value primarily as it was assumed to contribute to “creat[ing] the optimal environment for learning” (HEI T, strategic plan). Another HEI touted the effects of diversity on “higher critical thinking skills and the ability to facilitate unique and creative approaches to problem-solving arising from the integration of different perspectives” (HEI E, strategic plan). A third institution
proclaimed diversity and equity to be “integral parts of educational excellence and civic engagement” (HEI F, strategic plan). The same institution that articulated the definition of diversity cited above effectively synthesized other institutions’ arguments on behalf of diversity’s myriad benefits for “learning outcomes [and] … the educational potential of an institution” by taking a research-based approach (HEI R, diversity plan). This was the only institution to make references to research in its strategic plan. The writers cited research produced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and published in *The Journal of College Student Development* and *Review of Higher Education* to argue that “there is a clear correlation between the educational potential of an institution and the diverse composition of its student body, faculty, administrators, and staff” (HEI R, diversity plan).

Two other institutions made different arguments for the value of diversity; these were the only institutions to explicitly make these particular arguments, and they did so only in planning documents, not in conversations. The PASSHE system planning documents proclaimed the presence of a clear connection between diversity and innovation, noting, “From diversity comes innovation—the insight that comes from exposure to and interactions with different modes of thought, experiences, backgrounds, and cultural heritage” (PASSHE system strategic plan). One HEI’s strategic documents argued that increased diversity would raise the stature of the institution itself. In its strategic plan, this institution stated, “to become more like the very best colleges, [we] need to enroll a more global and ethnically diverse student body” (HEI P, strategic plan).
Balance between financial health versus diversity. All the study HEIs, in one form or another, made references to finances as an important driver of institutional choices. The need to achieve a balance between institutional financial health and the diversity of student population was a theme that ran through my interactions with almost every institution in the study and was inscribed, in some cases, in planning documents. A representative quote from the strategic plan of an inclusive, private, suburban HEI states,

Enrollment Strategy B: Develop and implement a plan to recruit and support a healthy diversity of students while meeting targets for student academic quality and College financial objectives. (HEI B, strategic plan)

In conversations about diversity and access, numerous institutions conveyed more of a sense of willingness to enroll students of diverse backgrounds, rather than an explicit goal to take active measures to increase the enrollment of diverse populations. This was framed as a need to put the overall financial health of the institution ahead of the goal of meeting the needs of traditionally underserved groups of students.

The longtime Director of Admissions at a moderately selective, private, urban HEI explained how, on a year-to-year basis, the recruitment of diverse students took a backseat to the overall goals of increasing the class and meeting enrollment goals. He cited financial concerns as the limiting factor. In response to my question about whether his institution had specific numerical goals for diversity, he said,

No, I wouldn’t say that [we have specific numerical goals]. This year, our mission in admissions was to increase the freshmen number [chuckles] from whatever population they come from…No, we have not gotten to the point where we wanna see…we’ve done that in the past. I’ve been here 12 years. There have been a few years that we’ve said we wanna increase diversity. We do have a minority scholarship that is set up that could go for minority students. That has happened over the years. This year, that wasn’t one of the common goals. Our goal was to increase the class while
holding the equality, and trying to hold on discount rate as well, because that’s always—back to the finances—what’s needed for a private, small liberal arts school right now with the very competitive market. (Bill, HEI Q)

For at least two institutions, the goal of a diverse institution was seen as having already been achieved, which necessitated no further active recruitment of diverse populations. By way of explaining her institution’s limited focus on the recruitment of diverse students in favor of other priorities, the Director of Admission at a small inclusive private HEI said this:

[A]t the beginning of the first strategic plan that called for growth in recruitment of minorities and diverse students in more than one way, not only racial diversity but socioeconomic and religious diversity were big goals. Now, since then, we have had very good success with that because—well, we’re located right outside of [a city] and we’re very reasonably priced, which makes us competitive for any student. That has now taken—for the new strategic plan that we’re getting ready to start, [recruitment of diverse populations] has taken a little bit of a back seat because it’s something that we don’t have an issue with. I mean, about 25 percent of our student body is diverse, so we’re pretty good in terms of where we want it to be, I guess. (Sarah, HEI B)

Other institutions framed the pursuit of a diverse student body secondary to the goals of achieving a healthy financial picture and overall enrollment targets. The Director at a highly selective, private, urban HEI touted his institution’s decade-long year-over-year increase in low-income and URM students to point out that there was “no need” for relationships at his HEI (Peter, HEI I). However, he went on to tell me that the HEI, despite already being diverse, was also still working on forging connections with organizations but that “the costs” had been prohibitive. He did not make clear what costs he was referring to, but it seemed clear that his concerns were financial. This perspective
shores up the idea that increasing the representation of diverse students is may be more of a luxury than a necessity, in trying financial times.

**Low-income students and Pell grant recipients.** Low-income and Pell grant recipients were mentioned in 8 of the 22 strategic plans and across interviews. Related goals were, first, to provide improved funding and, second, to bring the graduation rates of these students in line with those of their higher-income peers. Notably, and in keeping with the financial concerns that run through this study, no institutions stated in planning documents an interest in increasing the number or percentage of low-income students on campus. In essence, HEIs seemed to be indicating a desire to better serve their existing population of Pell recipients, but not to increase the overall number of Pell grant recipients on campus.

One highly selective private institution that maintained a number of formal and informal relationships stated in its strategic plan a general interest in “maintain[ing socioeconomic] diversity by increasing endowments to support scholarships even as we diversify the campus in other ways” (HEI A, strategic plan). Another moderately selective private HEI stated more specifically a desire to work toward a “pricing structure…in which a full Pell and PHEAA [Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency] eligible student can attend for no out-of-pocket expense when institutional financial aid and subsidized federal loans are taken into account” (HEI Q, strategic plan) One moderately selective, private, suburban HEI (HEI H) and the planning document for the entire PASSHE system both articulated an interest in more closely aligning the graduation rates of low-income students and their higher income peers.
An institution with a history of high percentages of Pell-eligible students – about 30% of the overall student body, according to my conversation and verified in IPEDS – articulated interest in optimizing institutional finances and the percentage of low-income students enrolled and described how they were intertwined rather than being either/or pursuits. The Senior Assistant Director at a highly selective HEI that maintained 10 partnerships described how the incoming Dean of Admission had looked at the percentage of low-income students and wondered, “Whoa, is this [financially] sustainable?” He went on to talk about how his institution was considering striking the balance of concern for Pell percentages, financial support for those students, and attention to the resources they need to reach graduation.

Having lots of conversations with development, there’s a capital campaign taking place to grow our endowment by about 200 million offset the cost of enrolling these [low income] students and I would say more than that, enrolling, retaining and graduating these students. It is definitely a conversation that’s taking place. Also thinking more strategically could we possibly lower the percentage of Pell eligible students however making the packages that we can offer more robust increasing graduation and retention rates as well. (Dominic, HEI A)

Only slightly more HEIs in this study were concerned with increasing overall student enrollment (15 HEIs) than with increasing the enrollment of diverse students (14 HEIs). Six of the 15 institutions that were interested in increasing enrollment explicitly stated an interest in increasing the diversity of enrolled students.

**Reasons to Form and Maintain Relationships**

Several common reasons for initiating and sustaining relationships with college access organizations emerged across study institutions. These motivations were expressed by representatives of institutions with longstanding relationships as well as by those at
institutions that had not yet initiated relationships with college access organizations but were contemplating doing so. Relationship building pertained both directly and indirectly to enrollment. The four most commonly expressed reasons for initiating and maintaining relationships were institutions’ belief that doing so could improve HEIs’ access to potential applicants; build trust in HEIs through association with NPOs; fill critical gaps in knowledge, experience or preparation for students and parents; and address demographic shifts. Representatives of study HEIs viewed relationships with NPOs as multipurpose tools that could also help address myriad problems, the amelioration of which contributed to more effective recruitment while also helping institutions speak to their mission and enhance their credibility in the eyes of communities and potential applicants.

**Improve direct access to students.** The most frequently mentioned benefit that relationships helped HEIs achieve was gaining access to an audience of students, often with less expenditure of effort, time and money than could be attained through typical recruitment practices (i.e., visiting high schools). Eleven institutions mentioned this as being the most important feature of working with nonprofits. A Director of Admission at a moderately selective private HEI, when I asked him how he chose entities to work with, said, “…quite frankly, the way that I do it is [I ask myself,] ‘Can they get me in front of kids who may be interested in coming to [my institution]. Can they help those kids get here?’” (William, HEI X). Another Admissions Director had worked at several different HEIs over the years, and at each had gained access to potential applicants through community organizations and nonprofits. His view was representative of most of the
study HEIs in that he emphasized using every available avenue to meet students where they are, in a physical sense as well as a metaphysical one. I began by asking him, “Theoretically, you could get direct access to people, but instead, you worked with non-profit organizations – why?”

It’s because they had better access to the people than we did…my recruitment team at the community college was myself and one other person, and with a city of 50,000 people, we needed to take that population and be able to…use the community organizations that we worked with, and the schools and everything. [W]e couldn't go around and meet one-on-one with every student. We had to find ways to get in and meet with students outside of their homes, and that’s not to say we didn't meet with them in their homes and stuff like that, or even at local businesses…It’s meeting them where they are rather than where we are…and I think that’s important, especially with a lot of first-generation families and first-generation populations in general. You have to meet them where they are because they don't know how to really initiate that relationship. If we can get out there and get into a spot where they’re comfortable, whether that’s a community center or whether that’s a church, [we’re gonna do that]. (Albert, HEI Y)

Another longtime Director of Multicultural Recruitment echoed this sentiment and pointed out that student audiences she spoke with through nonprofits were often “more interested in college” than those she encountered in visits directly to schools.

[T]hey can gather students for me and I don’t have to necessarily go out and find them. If the students are here and say they’re meeting at the school and I can go out and meet with them and I can talk to them about [my HEI], I have an audience. I think what [the NPOs] do is they give us an audience…of students who are more interested in college than us just going into a school and visiting. Sometimes you might have a roomful of students where half are interested in college period. The others are just trying to gather the information. They have a captive audience, which is helpful for me. (Betsy, HEI H)

Working through nonprofits and CBOs represented a mechanism to obtain access not only to more interested students, but also to more potentially qualified applicants.
One Assistant Director described how the NPOs he worked with rarely funneled applicants that were not a strong match for his HEI, academically or otherwise.

I typically don’t see an organization that sends me a kid that is not academically qualified or really doesn’t see themselves here [at my HEI]. They’ll [NPO staff] tell me that too. They’ll be honest, “Listen Anthony, this kid’s got a couple irons in the fire, and [your HEI is] seventh choice. If you got another kid who’s applying to you and is a better fit, it’s something for you to think about.” They do give us good guidance on their end. (Anthony, HEI G)

None of the study HEIs had completely handed over the student recruitment function to NPOs, nor were they planning to do so in future. Relationships with NPOs were not replacing a particular HEI function, but were instead enhancing the recruitment function by allowing admissions representatives to contact and interact with more students in a recruiting cycle than could have been achieved without the NPO.

**Improve indirect access to students.** Two of the seven institutions with formal partnerships had agreements with their partner NPOs that some formal marketing of the HEI would occur. This marketing took the form of including the HEI’s logos or brand on the NPOs printed materials, website, and other outward-facing assets. In the single MOU I was able to examine, the agreement listed one of the responsibilities of the partnering nonprofit as, “Listing [HEI P] as a [Charter A] College Partner on [their] publications, websites, and social media platforms” (HEI P, MOU). For this moderately selective private institution, affiliation with NPOs likely provided indirect access to students in the form of increased recognition in a wider, more national market.

I’ve been able to present at different conferences and be present at different events that have definitely allowed the HEI P name and brand to be more nationally recognized. I think both through the virtue of the partnerships, which is often in one way or another related to the topics that
I do present, then the partnerships themselves have definitely allowed [this institution] to be much more nationally recognized. (Jean, HEI P; strategic plan)

As one Multicultural Recruiter at a different moderately selective private institution put it, her HEI’s affiliation with a nonprofit “gets us another sense of getting publicity because we’re on all their brochures. It’s just like we’re branding” (Amanda, HEI C). The President of the institution corroborated this, noting that his institution’s standing was heightened by association with a trusted nonprofit that had four decades of work in the target community:

Some are largely communication, branding, marketing. Helping to get the word out. Some lend tremendous credibility to families, et cetera. For example, one of our main partners is [a Hispanic organization] outta…Texas. They’ve been in operation for 40-plus years. (Dr. Tim, HEI C)

HEI representatives perceived relationships such as the one described above as having value for the institution even though “not a lot” of students enrolled as a result (Amanda, HEI C). More common was a general sense, particularly among moderately selective, private HEIs (e.g., HEI A, HEI E, HEI Y) that even when HEIs were not directly in front of students affiliated with an NPO, the NPO was still making some effort to promote “positively promote all colleges” (Elizabeth, HEI V).

Relationships that did not include an explicit agreement to perform cross-organizational marketing nonetheless proved useful in improving the way HEIs presented themselves to potential applicants. The Director of Admission at a moderately selective private HEI with a number of relationships related a story of how the staff at a charter school partner kept his HEI from making a big marketing mistake.
Interviewee: I have a poster, our billboard; [it] has 11 people on it. In the middle, there is a guy, dark skinned, sunglasses, and he’s screaming. Everybody else is around him laughing. I’m like, “Why are we putting this up in Lehigh Valley, Philadelphia, and New Jersey?” My marketing department said, “What do you mean? It’s a great picture. Everybody is having fun.” I said it looks like a bunch of white people scaring a person of color. They [the marketing department] don’t know that. They’re all white. They don’t see that, but my counselor from Lehigh Valley says, “You can’t put that up here cuz it looks like a freaked out Hispanic person being afraid of the white people around them. My kids aren’t going to go to that school.” Oh, my God, so we put up a map in that school instead. They’re like, “Wow, that looks really nice,” and kids start signing up, so using them because they’re experts in the market, whether it’s the kids are poor and don’t think they can afford college, or in this case, they’re Dominican, Puerto Rican, all types of Latin Caribbean. That’s where they’re from, Central and South American or the Caribbean. Those kids wouldn’t see our marketing as for them. Now that’s a problem with marketing here, right?

Interviewer: Wait. You said using them, meaning who?

Interviewee: I’m sorry. At [the charter school], using the staff at [the charter school]…They’re informing us that our marketing is not working with their kids cuz we’re freaking them out. They’re also telling us this is not good [and asking,] “Why don’t you try something like this?” Oh, okay. We had 13 kids deposit out of 33 of their high school senior class. Thirteen kids came here last fall. (William, HEI X)

In this example, the HEI was able to exploit the local and culturally specific knowledge possessed by the staff at the charter school to keep from making a marketing misstep by applying a visual they used for general recruitment purposes in a largely Hispanic setting. Ultimately, he believed, it was the insight generated from this contact that helped achieve a high rate of deposits from students at the school.
**Build trust through association with NPOs.** Representatives of HEIs also believed that relationships with NPOs would build trust in their institutions among target populations (e.g., URM students, first-generation students, Hispanic students, low-income students). HEIs believed that these organizations were trusted by students and/or families and “spoke their language.” Said one Director of Admission at a moderately selective private HEI,

> The idea that they [NPOs] speak the language of the student that maybe this school doesn’t, or we in my admissions office doesn’t speak to them well—and I don’t mean Spanish and Mandarin and Portuguese for the Brazilian kids—I mean they [NPOs] tell our story; they provide us exposure to students who aren’t seeing us. That would be the number one thing. (William, HEI X)

In a similar vein, developing a relationship with trusted intermediary people such as program directors or counselors, who in some cases served as proxies for whole organizations, was also perceived as a mechanism to build trust in HEIs among target populations. One admissions representative at a highly selective private institution told a story about cultivating a director at a charter school who was “like a mom to the kids” and whom he “almost saw…as a gateway to her students.” For her to promote the HEI, however, she needed to do some vetting first. He explained a little bit about how his institution earned her trust. When she visited campus:

> [s]he didn’t want any admissions people in on the meetings [she had] with [current undergraduate] students. It was pretty clear she needed to form a pretty solid opinion of not only the school but [also] the students that would be – or the professional that would be – working directly with her students. It was so funny: I saw after that preliminary visit how so many things just opened up as a result. We got her on campus, had her meet our staff, then she brought a bus load of her students to campus and then she called me and invited me to college fair. I did mock interviews for those students. It was almost like little by little we got more awareness. I really
would attribute a lot that to the relationship that was cultivated as she got more comfortable with us I think she also promoted the college a lot more. (Dominic, HEI A)

By earning the Director’s trust, this HEI believed it had someone in its corner vouching for the institution. A Director of Admission at an inclusive private HEI echoed this perception, pointing out that the “trusted advisor” status of the NPO in turn conferred a “semi-trusted advisor label” on the HEI (Sarah, HEI B). She implied that attaining this trust would smooth the path to recruiting students affiliated with the organization. She said:

A community-based organization is a good resource, cuz they do have that access. They are in front of a lot of people. They’re trusted advisors already, so we would be able to tap into that group. Through a partnership with a community based organization, we would be able to get a semi-trusted advisor label to start with and work our way up from there. Aside from that, if we had unlimited resources, the statistics out there show that the decrease in high school graduates will continue for a couple more years. The market is very competitive, and if we can get a[n] already trusted advisor to endorse a particular school, then—us, let’s say—then hopefully we wouldn’t have to fight so hard for those applicants. (Sarah, HEI B)

The Director at another moderately selective private institution extended this theme, explaining why the strategy of forming relationships with “influencers,” as her referred to them, was not only efficient, but almost necessary, given the demands of admissions work. He said,

As admissions people, we don’t necessarily have the time or the ability to invest years and months of time working with students to provide… I mean we obviously want to provide access to higher education, but in addition to going out and recruiting students, we have to come back here and read applications, make decisions. We have to do programming on campus in terms of open houses, and sort of different and various events that we have to participate on as part of the recruitment process of students, which leaves, for us, pretty much…almost no time in terms of the ability to really
outreach to our communities outside of maybe our immediate local area to really do access-related things...[W]here we try to invest a lot of our time, as an institution, is in interacting with the influencers that influence college going, so parents, and guidance counselors, and the students themselves are our primary focus in terms of our ability to outreach and to provide information and to provide, I guess, enlightenment on the admission process, the enrollment process, college in general, affordability, all those types of things. (Albert, HEI Y)

An Assistant Director at a highly selective private HEI pointed out that NPOs did not “find” students for his HEI and described how a connection with an NPO could do more than even simply “providing us access to these kids.” Rather, an established connection made it possible that students affiliated with the organization would actively seek out the HEI:

Yes, they [good quality students] are floating around in each of the public schools, but making that match is a little bit harder [when all that happens is] you walk in a public school and your [HEI’s] poster’s up on the wall. Doesn’t guarantee that you’re gonna see those students, but when you have a counselor from organization that has made that connection, and especially if you are a partner of that organization, now they [students] come lookin’ for you. (Anthony, HEI G)

This sentiment has something in common with the prior quotation in which the speaker articulated the idea that the HEI “wouldn’t have to fight so hard” for those applicants if the HEI had a pre-existing affiliation with the NPO (Sarah, HEI B).

HEI interviewees also articulated the perceived value NPOs added in terms of offering to prospective applicants an arms-length endorsement of their institution. One HEI interviewee described how working through a nonprofit avoided a potentially negative aspect of the HEI’s own direct efforts to recruit students. He stated:

I guess the biggest thing that I see [nonprofits] can provide that [we] can’t is—at least on the initial end of being able to approach those students and speak into their lives without having any pressure of, “I’m trying to get something from you,” whereas if I go and talk to a student about what [my
institution] can do for them, as much as we have that mission mindset of ministering to these students and wanting to provide opportunity for them, whether we give the impression or not, it’s very easy for them to have the mindset of, “Well, are you just givin’ me a line to get my money to come to [your school]?” That’s not our intent at all, but yes, there’s a financial cost to attending college. (Justin, HEI J)

The Director of Admission at a women’s college explained how nonprofit “organizations, they can certainly promote us more,” by advocating on behalf of the HEI in a way the institution could not for itself. In particular, he believed that NPOs could convey the unique value proposition that his HEI offers. He said:

The other thing, too, is we’re different in the sense that we’re a women’s college. It’s important for our partners and the counselors who are behind those schools to say, “Hey, it’s okay that [they’re] a women’s college. They’re still on Planet Earth.” You say “women’s college” to a 17, 18-year-old person, they’re like, “Well, I don’t wanna go to a women’s college. There’s no boys there.” Helping [convey] the value of the women’s college to [potential applicants] is important. (James, HEI E)

HEIs also believed that by earning what amounts to a stamp of approval through association with a trusted nonprofit entity they may mitigate the sense among students that HEIs are trying to sell to them, which could make an institution more appealing precisely because it does not appear to be trying too hard.

…by going under this—call it a white flag—of “I’m just here to give you information,” students actually are a little more receptive. They’re a little more open to the information. They are a little bit more open to asking real questions. (Sarah, HEI B)

Visiting under what this Director of Admission at an inclusive private described as a “white flag” (Sarah, HEI B) of an association of HEIs conferred a degree of genuineness on participating HEIs and undercut the aspect of salesmanship – sometimes seen as distasteful, or disingenuous – that can permeate admissions events.
NPOs fill otherwise unmet needs for students, families, and communities.

Another reason HEIs identified for forming and maintaining relationships with NPOs was the perception or expectation that these organizations meet needs that were not otherwise being met. One interviewee indicated that NPOs provide “additional preparation before [students] come to college” (Betsy, HEI H). A representative from a moderately selective private HEI stated that NPOs provided services that most school counselors were not able to provide, explaining:

I looked at community-based organizations almost like it’s college counselors, in some cases. Where they’re stepping in, because of the huge workloads now at most schools for guidance counselors or school counselors, depending on their title, and them not being able to provide, in some cases, the necessary information that students need with colleges. (Matt, HEI U)

An Assistant Director at an inclusive public HEI indicated that NPOs fill gaps in students’ and families’ understanding of the importance of college and exposing them to different cultures, stating,

I think that they just in general [the NPOs] have a rapport with the students. That’s really the importance of working with community-based organizations because they get to know the students on a level that we can’t. They’re in the communities, they’re working with these students… I think the community as well in just educating the community on the importance of higher education and working with the students, like it takes a village to help the students who—and then also providing resources to students who are under resourced or underserved so that they may not have at home or in their schools. All of that goes back to not only college prep, but holistically if it’s an extra meal or extra outing, field trip, kind of cultural exposure exposing them to various aspects outside of their daily life. Exposing them to the different cultures and different communities. Yeah, helping them develop. (Elizabeth, HEI V)

Along the same lines, the president of a moderately selective private HEI noted that NPOs provide college-related knowledge and information to students who are do not
have access to this information from individuals in their schools or their families. He explained:

The places where students get the advice from are from these access organizations, who are almost surrogate parents. They serve the same function as the parents in [other] communities, where students are second and third generation [to college], and the parent can bring knowledge of the range of college options to the table. I think these access organizations and charter schools, with their guidance systems, are...for the student they’re fulfilling the functional role that a parent in an affluent household might play. (President Brian, HEI P)

HEIs recognized how nonprofits could provide students with certain experiences, knowledge or skills deemed necessary or desirable in the context of college, all of which could help HEIs achieve their goals of increasing enrollment of students of diverse backgrounds, as well as increasing enrollment overall.

Another perceived benefit of relationships with NPOs was to build awareness of the general value of higher education and importance of finding the right institutional fit for students. Respondents stressed that these goals were at least as important as advertising their own institution per se. Said one private HEI (or unknown selectivity) representative of his presentations at nonprofits: “The end goal is more about getting these kids exposed to college level work than it is about them coming to [my institution]” (Max, HEI L). Institutions took the opportunity of affiliation with a nonprofit to propound the general view that higher education is important and to educate people as to how it could be achieved, even if it could not be achieved at the speaker’s institution. The Director of Admission at a moderately selective private HEI said,

Yes, we’re promoting our institution, but we're also promoting college in general. I think most of the people that are in my role and in my field are really pushing college-going, and yes, we’re going to provide every
tremendously great reason why a student should consider our own institution, but we also recognize that providing a student the opportunity to find the right fit institution is more important than necessarily bringing a student in who is going to not have a good experience. (Albert, HEI Y)

This function was framed as a service to students, families and by extension to communities. One Director of Admission at a private inclusive HEI described the aim of her institution’s sole NPO relationship:

The goal of the [Association] is for all the colleges to—obviously, to talk about themselves and represent themselves, but talk about higher education in general. It’s not uncommon for during one of our panel presentations to talk about a route to a four-year degree through community college, even though none of us are community colleges. We talk about affording college; paying for college; the stigma that a four-year education is unaffordable. We try to convey the facts and figures about higher education, but also make personal connections that will allow these students to see themselves in the multicultural people they have in front of them. Many of us have gone through that personally, so we have personal and professional experience to relay. (Sarah, HEI B)

Rather than using relationships with nonprofits to learn about constituencies—their preferences, proclivities and habits, for instance—to target them more effectively, institutions were more often using relationships as a vehicle to educate constituents about the value of higher education and at the same time recruit them.

Some HEI representatives perceived that relationships with NPOs would add value over time, with one representative stating that forming relationships “helps to fuel the pipeline of students,” developing a sustainable stream of students from which to choose (Betsy, HEI H). The notion of developing a pipeline of students was expressed several times. In one representative exchange, the Coordinator of Multicultural Recruitment at a highly selective private HEI explained this:

*Interviewer:* You said earlier you see this as really a long-term strategy.
Interviewee: Yeah, exactly. For me it’s creating this pipeline or creating this relationship so that the trust can be increased. Institutions like HEI R don’t have the prestige of the name and population such as Harrisburg, so creating that name and creating a relationship can be someone that they trust. I don’t see it really benefitting [the HEI] until five years down the road or so.

... What I’ve seen actually is that my relationships have actually benefitted the reputation of [my institution] in the community, which, in the long term, will help with recruitment. It might not impact me directly because it might take five to ten years where we really build this relationship and people really trust us in the community, but they’ll start sending their students here. I believe that creating this pipeline or creating this posture of service which is really important is gonna be vital in enrollment. (Adam, HEI R)

The president of a moderately selective private HEI that had already established many relationships also expressed this sentiment. He articulated a belief that relationships with college access nonprofits not only led to increased numbers of URM students, but also contributed to the institution’s overall attractiveness to URM students that were unaffiliated with nonprofits.

The other thing that the partnerships have allowed us to do now, is we have enough of a critical mass that students of color from other communities, I think, are (1) probably hearing about us, but (2) when they come to visit they will see a student body where they say, “I could see myself fitting in here.” It’s actually strengthened our ability to recruit outside of the partnerships in communities of color as well. (President Brian, HEI P)

This president believed that its relationships with an NPO demonstrated his institution’s commitment to increasing diversity on campus and led to an increase in enrollment of students of color as well as other students.
**Addressing demographic pressures.** The importance of adapting recruitment strategies to recognize prevailing demographic trends was prevalent across institutions with and without relationships. As described earlier in this chapter, 12 institutions made explicit references to changing demography in strategic planning documents and/or in conversation. Nine of these institutions had relationships or were planning to initiate them.

Some study HEIs institutions were primarily concerned with local and regional population changes, as illustrated in this representative quote from a strategic planning document from a moderately selective private HEI:

> The composition of the higher education market will change in… important ways. First, there will be fewer students graduating from the region’s high schools, which will mean fewer traditional-aged applicants for the region’s colleges and universities. (HEI Q, strategic plan)

A moderately selective institution that was in the process of developing relationships with community-based organizations, primarily in Philadelphia, elucidated the calculus around the decision. The Director of Admission began by referencing “flat or even declining high school graduation numbers” in the Northeast and arguing, “schools still need students, and in order to find those students, you have to identify just different strategies” (Matt, HEI U). The president of a moderately selective private HEI that typically draws students regionally but not nationally, focused less on the age of students and instead on the concentration of growth in the country’s Latinx community. He explained:

> [t]he demographic for middle-class Caucasian that’s driven a lot of the private higher ed in the Mid-Atlantic Northeast, [there’s been an] 18 percent decline in the entire region. While the Latino is like goin’ like this
[points to the ceiling], right? All my other competitors are chasin’ these [points to the floor]. (President Tim, HEI C)

Other institutions, particularly those that tend to draw from a larger swath of the country, focused their concern on national population trends. Said one Associate Director of a moderately selective, private HEI that draws from a national pool of students, “[I]f you look at national high school graduation rates and population trends, your growth is not in the Mid-Atlantic States by any means” (Jean, HEI P). At her institution, the aim was to work on “staying consistent with the demographics of the nation in general” (Jean, HEI P). Echoing this sentiment, a representative from a highly selective, private, national HEI explained that it was imperative to develop new strategies for recruitment because we are rapidly approaching a time when “what we consider minority students will become the majority” in the country (Dominic, HEI A). He emphasized that addressing demographic shifts by making changes to recruitment strategies and practices was crucial not only to the goal of making sure “your student body resembles the changing demographics of our world” but also to maintaining “the livelihood of the institution from a financial standpoint” (Dominic, HEI A).

Among the seven “no relationship schools,” of which five were classified as inclusive HEIs that draw students almost exclusively from a two hour radius of their campuses, the viewpoint was that local demographics coupled with their open admissions policies precluded a need to have goals around traditionally underserved populations such as first-generation college students and underrepresented minorities. One representative from a highly selective private HEI explained: “As an institution, we have our problems
and things we have to work very hard on. This one [diversity], we’re doing quite well on” (Peter, HEI I). That is, the institution had been sufficiently responsive to local demographics, and therefore had no need to make further efforts. Local demographics had catalyzed other changes to these institutions’ recruitment practices, in particular the need to travel further away to recruit and fill the class.

Institutions that had not established partnerships or relationships also expressed awareness of the influence of demographics and how it had changed their practices or how it would be changing their practices in recruitment seasons to come. Said an Enrollment Manager of an inclusive public HEI of her region of Pennsylvania, “With the declining demographics and the number of institutions here [in our region], I’m tellin’ ya, we fight for every kid…” (Meredith, HEI F). For this institution, which had no partnerships, the main change necessitated by demographic shifts was the need to “broaden our recruitment territory…We’re going all across the state of Pennsylvania and even into our neighboring states to find those students who will fit” (Meredith, HEI F).

For other HEIs there was a new need to learn more about the constituencies they would need to begin recruiting. In the words of a Director of Admission at an inclusive private suburban HEI:

We have fewer students to pick from, which has really attributed to our lower enrollment. Our enrollment has dropped…There aren’t as many [high school] graduates as there used to be. We had a high school up the road that dropped by almost 20 students in a matter of a year. Yeah, so we’re trying to expand our reach. Our primary recruitment territory was really roughly like a two-hour radius from [our institution], where we really targeted our efforts. We know we need to go farther…We’ve expanded initially our radius to three to four hours…We’re really kind of trying to do some research, trying to understand some of the cultural and demographic differences of the populations that we are targeting,
specifically in the South. Then trying to figure out how we might need to alter our approach, our strategies, the way we market the school or whatever it is that we need to adjust…We’re looking at everything from the analytics on who is on our website to what we’re seeing, who we’re talking to, what their backgrounds are and taking it from there. (Judy, HEI N)

**Reasons are directly and indirectly related to enrollment.** Goals and aims articulated in written documents and conversations illustrate that the aims institutions hoped to achieve through relationships with external organizations were varied, and pertained both directly and indirectly to enrollment. Goals indirectly related to enrollment included improving reputation; providing enhanced learning opportunities for current students; enhancing employment opportunities for alumni; and increasing the appeal of the HEI’s setting.

Another highly selective, private, suburban HEI did not state in strategic planning documents an explicit goal to establish partnerships, and maintained few ties to nonprofits; nonetheless, the Coordinator of Multicultural Recruitment emphasized how relationships he had established would benefit his institution’s enrollment in the long term. He believed that his relationships would engender an interest in the institution among community members, and would also build trust, leading more adults to funnel students of their acquaintance to his HEI.

What I’ve seen actually is that my relationships have actually benefitted the reputation of HEI R in the community, which, in the long term, will help with recruitment. It might not impact me directly because it might take five to ten years where we really build this relationship and people really trust us in the community, but they’ll start sending their students here. I believe that creating this pipeline or creating this posture of service which is really important is gonna be vital in enrollment. (Adam, HEI R)
Other HEIs aimed at “building partnerships that expand our students’ experiences beyond our campus borders” (HEI E, strategic plan). At the time we spoke, the Director of Admission at this HEI – a moderately selective, private, urban institution – was in the process of establishing contracts with several charter networks. One highly selective private HEI noted that relationships with the local community could provide “a marketing advantage” or “increase recognition” of the institution and pointed out that the college’s success “has been intertwined with the well being of our local community since [our] inception” (HEI A, strategic plan).

One additional inclusive, private, suburban institution’s strategic plan included an emphasis on establishing relationships but planned to leverage these not for admission purposes, but rather for developing “new academic partnerships/consortial agreements…to support faculty and student exchanges” and “[t]arget[ing] corporate partnerships to enhance existing degree offerings and internships through various industry certifications” (HEI N, strategic plan). This institution’s Director of Admission, who had been promoted to her position only weeks before our conversation, reported that her institution had no relationships with nonprofits. In response to my question about the role that external organizations might play in recruitment moving forward, she said,

> We do want to be able to be out there working with these students and helping as much as we can in the process…We’re going to take any opportunity that pops up. I just don’t know yet all the opportunities that exist for us to do this. It’s absolutely something we would like to do. (Judy, HEI N)

She also noted in our conversation that her HEI had no goals for recruitment of low-income or URM students. She said,
No, [we have no specific goals for these populations,] it’s just who we are. Despite our efforts, it’s just who comes here. We’re actually a rural school. It’s this region of Pennsylvania. The profile of the student in our region is largely first generation, lower-income students…That’s going to be our primary audience no matter what. We don’t really need to target them specifically. That’s who’s in our backyard. That’s why that’s made up the nature of our students. (Judy, HEI N)

**Partnerships not viewed as the only solution.** Some institutional representatives recognized the importance of having a student population that mirrored broader demographic characteristics of the population, but did not see NPOs as helpful to the HEI in achieving this goal. A representative from a moderately selective private HEI that maintained a small number of relationships nonetheless argued that the most important “moves” his HEI made towards increasing access and diversity included going test optional; working with an institutional program to offer remedial courses that could then be transferable credits; and structuring financial aid so that Pell eligible students would not have to pay any out of pocket costs (Bill, HEI Q).

Similarly, the president of an urban institution, when asked about goals around increasing URMs at the institution, responded that there were no such goals because the institution already “pretty much mirror[s] the ethnic profile of [this city] more than any other school in the region, except the community college” (President Keith, HEI T). He went further to say that “any school would be happy to take more minorities, but we’re not setting specific goals to increase our ethnic representations because our profile is pretty good.”

A Director of Admission at a rural HEI, when asked about whether the institution had goals for low-income, first generation or URM students, responded similarly:
No, [there are no goals;] it’s just who we are. Despite our efforts, it’s just who comes here. We’re actually a rural school. It’s this region of Pennsylvania. The profile of the student in our region is largely first generation, lower-income students…That’s going to be our primary audience no matter what. We don’t really need to target them specifically. That’s who’s in our backyard. That’s why that’s made up the nature of our students. (Judy, HEI N)

Another institution explained its lack of a need for relationships as rooted in a history characterized by inclusivity rather than exclusion. He likened the relatively recent interest in the recruitment of URM students at other HEIs to when the Ivy League institutions decided to admit women.

*Interviewee:* When [institutions] said, “Well, we’re not gonna do it like that [men only] anymore, now we’re gonna start enrolling women.” It’s like, well, if you have 75 years of not really showing that you were actively recruiting women—

*Interviewer:* Yeah. You’re digging yourself out of a hole.

*Interviewee:* Exactly right.

*Interviewer:* [You’re saying that] you guys didn’t have a hole to begin with?

*Interviewee:* Exactly. (Max, HEI L)

Institutions like the ones above that had already achieved parity with their local population demographics viewed relationships as unnecessary.

Although overall more institutions mentioned ties to nonprofits in conversations (18 HEIs) than in planning documents (7 HEIs), relationships were described as potentially useful for a variety of purposes related directly and indirectly to enrollment. These useful functions ranged from getting in front of more students, to enhancing relationships with the local community, helping offer students a more compelling
curriculum, to simply being a general tactic that would allow institutions to do more with less.

Evaluating and Ending Relationships

Of the 17 HEIs that maintained relationships, only six tracked any data associated with their relationships, which included, for instance, how many students that had visited from a particular NPO subsequently enrolled (e.g., HEI H, HEI V; both moderately selective HEIs, one public and one private); which students had come to the HEI through a particular program (e.g., HEI A, HEI P, HEI U; all private HEIs, two moderately selective, one highly selective); or the graduation rates for students associated with a particular NPO (HEI A; a highly selective private HEI). A representative from a highly selective, private, urban HEI, which maintained numerous relationships of varying formality, went back through historical admission records and reconstructed data regarding which students had been affiliated with which program; he was the only interviewee to mention undertaking such a project. Notably, he undertook this project explicitly to understand both which relationships had been useful and which might prove fruitful in future. He said,

Interviewee: When I came, we hadn’t necessarily tracked all of the relationships that we had. With my background knowledge of organizations, I was able to go in to the previous three years and track every kid through their application and find out that they were part of an organization.

Interviewer: You went back and generated that data?

Interviewee: Yes. [Then I was able to] say [to the Dean], “Listen, these are all the organizations represented in the applicant pool of the students, because of something that was found in their application. Whether they mentioned it in their essay, or they
mentioned it in their activities.” I said, “If you looked at these applicants close enough, you’ll see you’re seeing a lot of kids from New Jersey SEEDS. You’re seeing these students, and perhaps we should probably get them [the organization] on the phone… [Laughter] and strengthen that relationship a little bit, because maybe they can continue to send [us] the quality that we seek.” (Anthony, HEI G)

In response to my question of how his institution was tracking whether their initiatives had any effect, the Director of Admission at one moderately selective, private religious institution articulated several data points his HEI collects. At the same time, however, he also revealed the difficulty of attributing an individual student’s choice to enroll at his HEI to any one event, experience, or initiative.

Yeah, so we do track test optional. We do track the traffic that we receive, as far as the events on campus, and who attended what event. If they came to an open house, if they came on a bus trip, we do track all of those things. Then we can kind of tally them up. Just really in our minds, I would say we have hard data that this student attended because of this, but we can at least track the events that students attended, and kind of their academic history, and kind of form an opinion whether or not we feel like these initiatives worked or not. (Bill, HEI Q)

The difficulty of measurement described in the passage above leads understandably to a reliance on “soft” data, generated anecdotally. One quotation from a longtime Multicultural Recruiter at a moderately selective, private, suburban HEI that maintained relationships with a variety of NPOs was representative of kinds of “soft” data collection practices that predominated in many of these relationships. In response to my question of how the HEI evaluated relationships on an ongoing basis, she said,

Actually, right now we’re not collecting any data on a consistent basis. I believe that we look at, from an academic standpoint, we look at the progress of the students in the partnerships…That is actually now, it used to be under admissions but now it’s under [the] academic dean. He’s very much aware of what’s going on in terms of how well the students are
doing in those classes. I’m not sure what he does with that information. I’m not sure what he does with the information. It is a collaborative effort. We’re going back and forth with the classes are going well and they’ll contact admissions. Classes are going well. The dean might go in and talk with them and see if any students are interested in applying now. Other than that we don’t have any data *per se* [that] I am aware [of] on these partnerships. (Betsy, HEI H)

**Failure to meet anticipated results and expected benefits.** Of the 18 HEIs with relationships, six reported cutting ties with at least one nonprofit when anticipated results and expected benefits did not materialize (these were not the same six institutions that collected some form of data, though there was some overlap). These benefits and results typically revolved around increasing the number of applications, but also extended to retaining students. Results were expected of paid relationships or contracts as well as informal or unpaid relationships.

One Director of Admission explained that a contractual relationship that included a yearly subscription fee (the amount of which he did not disclose) had failed to yield any applications at all, and was subsequently ended. His institution was seeking to recruit first-generation college students through this relationship, which was entirely web-based. He explained how the site worked:

> Like [FirstGen] was one [partnership] that was geared specifically for first-generation students that we partnered with last year. We did enter into a contract with them for a full year, and they pretty much have a profile on their website, they’re advertising colleges to first-generation students and what services, as the university, provides for your first-generation students. We did that for about a year and didn’t really see, honestly, we didn’t see anything, and they didn’t send us any students at all. We said, “Thanks, but it’s just not working for us.” (Matt, HEI U)

Despite the failure of this particular relationship, the Director went on to explain that his institution had recently formed a relationship with another organization that was
using a similar format. This response to a failure – to try again with another organization – not only illustrates the institution’s commitment to the effort of recruiting diverse students, but also suggests a strong belief in the expected benefits of partnership.

A Director of Admission at a moderately selective, private, urban HEI noted that his HEI waited three years to end its affiliation with a particular association of regional HEIs. He cited similar reasons for pulling out of the relationship: they were spending money to travel to fairs and recruit students, but “we weren’t enrolling any kids.” He went on to explain,

We did end with [the Association] for a while. It’s to provide exposure and access and direction for minorities, low socioeconomic status minorities. That’s what it is, underrepresented students, and quite frankly, we weren’t getting any students from it. We were spending a few thousand dollars a year in travel and hotels and what have you. Even to go to the college fairs, it cost a couple of bucks to go to the college fairs, maybe $25.00 for a fair, but we weren’t enrolling any kids. We went three years in a row, and we didn’t enroll any kids from it. There was business decision made that it’s not worth it to put somebody there when we can have them in travel season someplace else. We made that decision; we ended that relationship. (William, HEI X)

This “business decision” was that it was more efficient to have admissions staff expanding their recruitment into new geographic territories than attending a nonprofit’s college fair.

This HEI actually reengaged with the association a few years later in attempt to address the region’s changing demographics. The Director suggested that perhaps his HEI needed to reevaluate its materials and staff members to find success with the same association, rather than finding a new association or organization. He said:
[T]he population of those students—underrepresented, not normal college students, first generation—it’s on the increase so much that we know it’s a good organization, maybe we just didn’t—and this, again, all of this stuff is sort of tying together—maybe we didn’t have the right materials. Maybe we didn’t have the right people at the college fairs, so we’re looking at our lack of success now and maybe it was us and not them. (William, HEI X)

This was the only reported instance of an HEI ending and re-engaging with an NPO, but the reasons for leaving, as well as the reasons for re-engaging, are in line with other themes that emerged in this study: demographic and financial pressures. In these cases and in the other four cases of terminated relationships, the cost in terms of financial outlay and/or admissions staff time was not resulting in sufficient numbers of applications or sufficient applications from the groups most of interest. It required an input of resources without demonstrating sufficient returns.

A moderately selective private institution that had not ended a relationship established to recruit in a specific geographic area (but was contemplating ending it) noted that, “while we have seen increases in applications [and] we've seen increases in admissions to the college, we have not seen an increase resulting in enrollment” (Albert, HEI Y). He said,

[Pact Foundation]…is one of those programs that we are potentially considering not being a part of anymore, simply because we have not seen the return on our investment. We were spending time and money and things like that to be involved in the program, and we are not seeing the increase in enrollment that we…not that we wanted to see tremendous growth, but in programs like that, generally, if we can enroll one or two more students, they tend to pay for themselves. It’s not like we definitely were out there looking for 10, 15 more students out of a program like that. Literally, it’s usually like, “Well, if we can get one student, we’re in good shape.” (Albert, HEI Y)
He went on to describe how the relationship with this particular organization had been intended to fill in gaps in the institution’s capacity to recruit.

I mean yeah, that’s really the only one that I can say that we are [considering ending], because it requires a monetary investment, and it requires an investment of time and effort in an area that we don’t tend to spend a lot of time doing our own recruitment in. I think we really looked at that relationship as an opportunity to try to recruit students through an avenue in an area where we are not able to invest a lot of our personal time in recruiting and working with students and families because of the distance from campus and because of the location. (Albert, HEI Y)

HEIs also severed or considered severing relationships when the NPO did not deliver candidates of sufficient academic qualifications. An Assistant Director at a moderately selective private HEI explained, “[T]here wasn’t this great fit, so that’s why I said—there’s really no need to call [the nonprofit] up and say, ‘Hey, could [you ask your student to complete her application?]’ or [to] really strengthen this [relationship], because we just haven’t seen it” (Anthony, HEI G). In this case, the NPOs history of not providing attractive or viable applicants to the HEI did not result in the severing of all ties, but rather in a gradual tapering, a sort of falling to the bottom of the list of NPOs with which this institution worked. Another institution – one of only six HEIs that kept records on students affiliated with NPOs – also expressed concern about a relationship whose affiliated students were “not graduating at quite the rate that we would like them to given the financial resources that we put in,” a circumstance that led to “why we’re reevaluating maybe the type of partnership that we have with this group” (Dominic, HEI A).

While most interviewees expressed concerns about fit between students and their HEI, only two of the six HEIs that had ended relationships specifically mentioned a lack
of applicants with sufficient academic qualifications as the motivation to cut ties. When
the expectation that a relationship with an NPO would improve recruitment, matriculation
and retention of target populations was not met, institutions began to contemplate
severing ties. A single outlier (HEI X, a moderately selective private institution) had
ended a relationship with an NPO that had perpetrated a fraud by charging students and
families to perform a service that should have been free.

**Failure to cultivate personal relationships/turnover.** Among study HEIs,
personal connections between personnel at HEIs and NPOs contributed to the initiation
and maintenance of relationships; similarly, the severing of personal relationships
contributed to the demise of interorganizational relationships. Accordingly, office
leadership, staff turnover and the structure of admissions work itself may influence
formation of relationships, as well as to their ongoing health. Some interviewees
indicated that these factors may undermine HEIs’ ability to nurture relationships with
NPOs, further suggesting the importance of interpersonal dimensions in the establishment
and maintenance of relationships.

Staff turnover within an admissions office had a negative impact on relationships
with NPOs primarily when individual admissions officers were tasked with managing
those relationships, rather than relationships being administered or managed centrally.
This was the case for offices that operated on a “territory model” of recruitment. In this
model, an individual manages a bounded geographic area, from planning and executing
recruitment travel (deciding which parts of a territory to visit, as well as which schools,
nonprofits, and individuals to contact), through evaluation and selection of applicants.
One Assistant Director of Admissions noted the intertwining influences of the person in the Multicultural Recruiter role, high rates of staff turnover on maintaining relationships and the structure of admissions work itself:

…I definitely know depending upon whom [sic] it is that’s in this position, coordinator of multicultural recruitment, [this] person has really been tasked with cultivating some of the relationships with the CBOs and so forth. Based on our current model we also had a territory model, so while this [coordinator] is supposed to help cultivate those relationships sometimes they are not always in that person’s travel territory. I know we all have great intentions but realistically there isn’t as much nurturing that takes place [with this model]. With some organizations you have to physically be there, you have to do a lot of communication and sometimes it doesn’t always happen. If there isn’t the, I would say the insight by the Dean or Director [of Admissions], sometimes…[relationship cultivation is] not as strong from year to year. (Dominic, HEI A)

Staff churn was reported as an impediment to sustaining forward momentum once a strong working relationship had been established. An Assistant Director for Multicultural Recruitment at a moderately selective, public HEI who had been in her role for just a year explained that her HEI had good rates of enrolling students that had come to campus to visit, but that staff changes had disrupted this record of success: “We track the data of how many students are coming to campus and then whether or not they enroll. It hasn’t been as high as we would like because a lot of the turnover in this position” (Elizabeth, HEI V). An Associate Vice President at a moderately selective, private, suburban HEI corroborated this view, explaining how turnover among staff could contribute to “loss of momentum.” He said:

I think oftentimes, especially in these types of organizations, you see [relationships] fall by a wayside because either somebody from the institution, like myself, left that institution and went somewhere else, and the person that came in and replaced didn’t see the same importance or the
same value in that, or somebody from the nonprofit transitioned out, whatever, and loses the momentum of it. (Daniel, HEI D)

The president of a moderately selective private HEI with numerous relationships had not experienced an end to any partnerships at the time we spoke, but envisioned how a change in leadership at a partner organization could put a relationship “on pause mode” (Dr. Tim, HEI C), as parties on both sides work to reestablish not only priorities but also the interpersonal relations that characterize strong interorganizational relationships.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

This chapter discusses what this study’s findings suggest about HEIs’ practices around college access and diversity and how these findings both support and deviate from the propositions identified in prior research and the guiding conceptual framework. The chapter also offers implications for practice and suggests avenues for future research. The aims of this study were to learn more about the relationships that higher education institutions have with NPOs with the goal of promoting college access and enrolling a diverse student body. The findings describe how the relationships are distributed among institutions; how HEIs describe what motivated their initiation and maintenance over time; how institutions evaluate the success of these relationships; and the content and dimensions of these relationships.

Institutional Characteristics and Relationships

As originally conceived, this study’s conceptual framework posited that institutional characteristics might be related to why particular HEIs engage in and maintain relationships with nonprofits. The research questions subsequently included a reference to identifying the characteristics of HEIs that form ties with college access nonprofits. However, conclusions about the relationships between institutional characteristics and relationships with NPOs are inclusive, largely due to limitations in the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study.

The analyses of variance (ANOVAs) indicated that institutional characteristics that had a statistical relationship to the percentage of Pell recipients (control, selectivity,
and size) were unrelated to the percentage of URM students on Pennsylvania four-year campuses over time. Conversely, the level of urban-ness appeared to be related to the percentage of URM students on campuses but unrelated to Pell recipients. Religious affiliation had no relationship to either variable. Variations in the relationships between various institutional characteristics and the representation of URMs and Pell recipients suggests that there is a more nuance with respect to which HEIs engage in relationships with NPOs than can be uncovered by the exploratory analyses conducted for this study. The quantitative analyses were conducted for 113 HEIs. The small size of the qualitative sample – 25 HEIs – also limits the ability to draw conclusions about how the motivation to form relationships with college access nonprofits may vary based on institutional characteristics. Further research is required to understand this issue.

**Relationships That Are Not Relationships**

Seen through the lens of the literature on what is variously referred to as “collaboration” (Kezar, 2005), “partnership” (Waddock, 1998, as quoted in Googins & Rochlin, 2000, p. 130), “interorganizational relationship (IOR)” (Galaskiewicz, 1985), or “alliance” (Eckel & Hartley, 2008), the interactions described in this study fail to meet most of the criteria that would allow them to be classified in one of the above categories. Individual institutions that have ties to other entities may have an array of types of relationships, from transactional to more deeply collaborative interactions. One limitation to the design of this study was that I could not assess whether relationships were “transformational,” because by definition, this designation requires looking deeply into both entities involved in a relationship (whereas I examined only HEIs in this study).
The interactions HEIs described did not include shared goal development, evaluation, structured dialogue, or many of the other elements that research indicates are signifiers of inter-organizational relationships (e.g., Frey et al., 2006; Kezar, 2005, 2006). The relationships described by my interviewees fail to meet most of the conditions laid out by the researchers: in particular they lack the interactive processes around decision-making, mutual financial support (it is typically a one-way financial transaction, if funds are exchanged at all), evaluation, structured dialogue, or shared governance structure.

The theoretical frameworks that help locate relationships in more general categories are somewhat more helpful for understanding the relationships identified in this study. Using Gajda’s (2004) continuum of cooperation to coadunation as a reference suggests that few of the relationships identified in this study would reach beyond the “coordination” stage. In a similar vein, on the seven-stage continuum between simple coexistence, through communication, cooperation, coordination, coalition, collaboration and, finally, coadunation (which means “having grown together”), relationships identified in this study would go no further than communication (Frey et al., 2006, p. 385). The interactions described in this study most closely resemble what Bowen et al. (2010) call “transactional engagement strategies,” which are based on “‘giving back’ through community investment and information,” consist of “occasional interaction,” and are “merely symbolic” (p. 305).

Only one of the seven studied institutions with contracts or MOUs of some kind allowed me to examine documents. As such, it would be unwise to assume that the content of the sole contract I examined is comparable to others. I therefore cannot come
to any conclusions about the extent to which institutions that had established MOUs or contracts documents comport with or diverge from the literature. However, HEIs that maintained MOUs or contracts still cannot be said to have established true partnerships. These interactions are low on the “value-exchange continuum” that describes the process through which successful partnerships move. “Reciprocal exchange,” the lowest level on the continuum, “lends itself well to formal, contractual relationships” of the kind seen in this study (Googins & Rochlin, 2000, p. 140).

This study reveals that what institutions often refer to as partnerships, collaborations, or relationships are not actually any of these constructs as defined in existing bodies of literature—despite what HEIs may believe or may aspire to. Whether because of limited staff time, financial constraints, failure of imagination, passivity, cultural differences, or other factors not mentioned in this research or others, HEIs in this study had not generally established ties with nonprofit college access organizations that could be classified as truly collaborative relationships. This finding is in line with how Googins and Rochlin (2000) put it almost 20 years ago: “[i]n practice, the rhetoric of partnerships appears to outpace their reality” (p. 131).

How should we classify and think about these arrangements, if they are not alliances, partnerships, or relationships even in the presence of contracts or MOUs? The interactions identified in this study most closely resemble what Whetten (1981), in an early review of IORs, terms “less formal dyadic linkages” (p. 5). “This linkage,” he wrote,

…entails simple coordination of various aspects of two organizations’ production activities… In the education and training sector this often takes
the direction of one organization providing intake, screening and placement services and another organization providing the actual education services. These dyadic linkages differ from joint ventures since a unique organizational entity or project is not created. Instead, organizations simply agree to coordinate their respective activities to increase efficiency. Because the commitment of organizational resources is modest, the relationship is typically less formal and consequently more difficult to maintain. It is generally dependent on the informal agreement between the initiators and, as a result, it is vulnerable to turnover in organizational personnel. (p. 5)

I quote Whetten’s (1981) description here at length because of the extent to which it describes the interactions described in the majority of interviews conducted for this study. Of particular interest is Whetten’s argument that this kind of linkage is particularly vulnerable to disruption through changes in personnel. My findings with respect to the importance of interpersonal relationships in the formation and maintenance of these pseudo-relationships (or “less formal dyadic linkages”) comport with Whetten’s.

In their empirical study of collaboration among nonprofits, Guo and Acar (2005) found that an entity “was more likely to develop formalized collaborations when it is older, has larger budget size, receives government funding but relies on fewer government funding streams, has more board linkages with other nonprofit organizations, and is not operating in the education and research or social service industry” (p. 342). Thus in many ways the finding that the interactions happening in this study are “pseudo-relationships” rather than real collaborations or partnerships is not surprising. Rather, the finding simply reinforces that tuition-driven, federally underfunded, non-elite educational institutions like the ones that comprise the study sample are unlikely to be able to benefit from the much-touted advantages of collaboration.
**Interpersonal relationships.** Although not comporting with the descriptions of relationships developed by researchers and theorists, the relationships identified by interviewees often included strong personal connections between individuals across institutions. Research has suggested that “collaboration depends upon the positive personal relations and effective emotional connections between partners” (Marek et al., 2015, p. 69) and that personal relationships are, in essence, the glue that keeps more formal relationships in tact. The relationships described in this study, therefore, may be precursors to the more formal relationships delineated in the literature (e.g., Bowen et al., 2010; Frey et al., 2010; Gajda, 2004).

In the educational partnerships literature, researchers have particularly emphasized the need to focus on the relational aspects of development and maintenance (Eckel & Hartley, 2008; Kezar, 2011). This study’s findings with regard to the importance of person-to-person relationships in the context of organization-to-organization interactions are consistent with the voluminous literature that documents this phenomenon. Among nonprofits (e.g., Kezar, 2005; Tsasis, 2009; Snavely & Tracy, 2002) as well as in nonprofit/for-profit relationships (e.g., Austin, 2000; Le Ber & Branzei, 2009), trust and strong interpersonal relationships were considered critical “alliance drivers” (Austin, 2000, p. 81). More specifically, Kezar (2005) found that relationships “were much more important in the higher education setting than learning or formal assessments to the development of a context for collaboration” (p. 846). This study adds further credence to these assertions in particular through the finding that a failure to nurture personal relationships between representatives of each entity, as much
as a failure to achieve a hoped-for efficiency, can result in the tapering off or ending of a relationship.

Kezar’s (2010) study suggests that additional barriers to successful partnerships can be “turnover of staff, change in leadership, or human fallibility such as weak memory” (p. 233). My study found that the first two were important themes in the maintenance of relationships between HEIs and NPOs. This study’s findings and those of other researchers (e.g., Kezar, 2010; Kezar et al., 2010; Whetten, 1981) stand in contrast to models of organizational learning suggesting that staff turnover is not uniformly detrimental and that it may in fact have benefits to the organization. March (1991) found that “slow learning [among staff members] and rapid turnover [of staff] leads to inadequate exploitation” while exploration, by contrast, was reduced when new staff members came into an organization and were too quickly socialized into existing practices, making it less likely that they would innovate (p. 79). This model makes intuitive sense: if you hire people but tell them, “You must to do it this way, which is the way we’ve always done it,” it follows that they will be less likely to explore and to contribute new variations on old themes. March’s (1991) model, however, does not take into account the interpersonal dimensions that characterize the relationships explored in this study and the possible disruption to an organization’s relationships represented by the loss of a personal connection between people at two collaborating entities.

**Efficiency Is Primary Motivation to Form Relationships**

What this research contributes to our knowledge with respect to the motivation to form these types of dyadic linkages is twofold. First, HEIs perceive that efficiency in
recruitment of students is the most important motivation driving them to form and maintain relationships with NPOs. In the case of those institutions that do not have ties to NPOs, the promise of less costly recruitment is also described as the most important enticement to these HEIs being open to relationships. Second, on a yearly basis, HEIs hope to spend less money and less time to achieve – or surpass – the minimum number of students required to keep the institution afloat financially; this is their working definition of efficiency in recruitment.

That efficiency is an important driver of relationships within this context may at first seem surprising for several reasons. First, the entities in this study are all nonprofits and a drive for efficiency above all is not typically associated with nonprofits. Second, as a sector, higher education is regularly accused of waste and of uneconomically deploying resources. In writing about nonprofit collaboration, numerous researchers have argued that efficiency is an insufficient theoretical framework to explain such collaborations in large part because of its lack of attention “to those constraints on strategic choice that are embedded in an organization’s institutional environment” (Guo & Acar, 2005, p. 341; see also Oliver, 1990 & Galaskiewicz, 1985). A focus on efficiency may also be surprising in light of some researchers’ assertions that “the main motivator for collaboration, in loosely coupled systems like higher education, is the ability to develop superior knowledge” (Googins & Rochlin, 2000, as quoted in Kezar, 2006, p. 808).

This finding of an emphasis on improving the ratio of inputs to outputs may be explained by the fact that admissions offices – from aims, to operations, to finances – are a distinctly different business unit from the departments and academic programs that
comprise the rest of a university and which have most often been the focus of researchers (see for instance, studies by Eckel & Hartley [2008] on curricular joint [academic] ventures; and Kezar, [2005, 2006] on intra-institutional collaboration across academic and student-centered departments). In an uncertain and fluid context characterized by growing costs, a rapidly changing pool of potential applicants, and an increasing demand for institutions to make clear education’s return on investment (ROI), it is not surprising that HEIs should be concerned with the bottom line.

Concern for the bottom line is consistent with research suggesting that entities are undergoing what researchers within management have referred to as “intersectoral blurring” (Selsky & Parker, 2005, p. 853). One study of how nonprofits differ from other types of organizations found that nonprofits’ reliance on government funding and market-earned income contributed to them being increasingly “compel[led] to adopt business- and government-like characteristics for survival” (Knutsen, 2012, p. 1002). Among these characteristics is a growing emphasis on efficiency. Knutsen (2012) also suggests that the values-and-causes based proposition of nonprofits (as opposed to the profit proposition that characterizes private companies) is unable to financially sustain the entities such that they are driven to adopt the practices of their counterparts in other sectors, for instance marketing and advertising (Knutsen, 2012).

Though Knutsen’s (2012) study was of a traditional, service-oriented nonprofit rather than an HEI, The study nonetheless has some parallels with the education sector. First, the study underscores the influence of the financial concerns that animate this study and serve as both an enabler and a limiting factor of relationship formation. Second, it
explains, at least in part, HEIs’ interest in the marketing possibilities offered by their relationships with nonprofits. In a slight expansion of Knutsen’s (2012) finding that nonprofits are adopting the practices of government and business, this study suggests that HEIs may move beyond adopting the practices of other sectors to also adopt mindsets – “efficiency above all” – even as they attempt to hold onto what one representative from a highly selective private HEI called a “posture of service” as nonprofit entities.

**Efficiency, legitimacy, and stability are intertwined.** The findings also illustrate that, in this context, the contingencies of stability and legitimacy are more intertwined with efficiency and with one another than Oliver’s (1990) framework might suggest. To the voluminous literature on IORs, Oliver (1990) made the important contribution that “contingencies may interact or occur concurrently when the organization decides to establish an IOR” (p. 242; italics added). This study illustrates that, while the overall reasoning for entering into relationships with nonprofits is to recruit sufficient numbers of students with a smaller outlay of institutional funds and staff time, the motivation to form these relationships almost always exists at the intersection of contingencies. While there is a hierarchy of motivations in the establishment of the kinds of relationships studied here, interaction among contingencies – rather than being the exception, as Oliver (1990) suggested – is the rule.

Entering into a relationship is rarely, if ever, perceived by participants as occurring purely for efficiency-related reasons. Participants in this study perceive that working with a nonprofit has potential to build a pipeline of students that will support their institutions’ need to sustain or grow its enrollment numbers, even if the time frame
in which this will occur is unclear and the return uncertain. Similarly, working with a nonprofit is perceived to confer status on the HEI as an institution legitimately invested in the project of college access; this legitimacy is believed to contribute to institutions’ attractiveness to potential applicants, thereby contributing to both building the pipeline and working toward enrollment goals. In isolation, however, neither stability nor legitimacy appears to be a strong enough motivator to form a relationship. That is, no single institution indicated in planning documents or in an interview that a relationship was formed purely to bolster institutional reputation or purely to develop a pipeline (without any attention to the current recruitment cycle).

HEIs did not appear to perceive that entering into relationships with NPOs was a move calculated to gain legitimacy for its own sake. HEIs perceived, instead, that their pursuit of legitimacy – coming under the “white flag” of an intermediary organizations (e.g., Sarah, HEI B), for instance, or cultivating a key staff member at an NPO (e.g., Dominic, HEI A & Anthony, HEI G) – was a means to an end: more efficient recruitment. Stability in the pipeline of future applicants, on the other hand, has its own intrinsic benefits in that it provides a long-term solution to the problem of insufficient numbers of applicants. And yet stability without efficiency is forsaking short-term gains in favor of (uncertain) long-term gains. As the data illustrate, relationships with potential to increase the HEI’s standing while also increasing applicants and/or enrolled students within a single recruitment cycle as well as in future cycles, proved attractive to HEIs.

This study contributes to our understanding an expanded definition of how HEIs conceive of efficiency with respect to student recruitment. These data support the logical
assumption that institutions are interested in finding ways to spend less money and less
time (which is equal to money, in many cases) to recruit and ultimately enroll a sufficient
number of students to keep their doors open. In practice and in this context, efficiency
does refer to an HEI’s desire to “improve its internal input/output ratio” with respect to
time and money (Oliver, 1990, p. 245). This study contributes the idea that for HEIs,
relationships are not simply about recruiting students using fewer dollars or less staff
time; they are also about building a reputation as an institution that cares about URM
students, low-income students, or other specific populations of interest in order to recruit
more of these students. That is, these relationships can be understood to be mechanisms
that can be used to build institutional reputation around commitment to college access
and diversity, the development of which is perceived to have long-term benefits for the
recruitment of students.

**Legitimacy Masquerading as Efficiency**

This study was not designed to assess claims of effectiveness, and therefore
makes no claims as to the success of relationships in achieving institutional goals.
However, this research does suggest that, from an institutional standpoint, it is difficult to
support the claim that these relationships are primarily about spending fewer dollars and
less time to recruit the appropriate number of incoming students. There are three primary
reasons why this claim is difficult to support. First, while it is possible that I did not reach
the right people or review the right documents, few HEIs revealed concrete goals with
respect to what they hope to achieve through relationships with NPOs. Second, few HEIs
attempt to measure the outcomes of their interactions with NPOs. The absence of some
form of evaluation raises questions about whether HEIs are serious about making sure that their outputs in terms of staff time, dollars, and other more intangible resources, are leading to desired results. Third, the few institutions that make efforts to measure the results of their relationships – along whatever metric they deem appropriate – often rely on “soft” measures, anecdotal evidence, or “gut” feelings to do so. Without goals or measures, claims that efficiency is the reason to form the relationship are suspect. Not only is there no starting point or baseline metric at which an institution begins measuring, there is no endpoint against which to evaluate an HEI’s forward progress. Furthermore, whatever the results of their quasi-evaluations, HEIs rarely sever ties. This is true even in cases where relationships are not perceived to produce desired results, raising further questions about whether efficiency is a primary motivation.

The reframed and expanded definition of efficiency suggested by these findings and discussed above may help explain why some HEIs persist in relationships even without evidence of their effectiveness, or – perhaps more notably – in the face of evidence that the relationships are not effective in addressing particular goals. To be fair, measurement of meaningful outcomes for students associated with a particular NPO is notoriously difficult (e.g., Harvill, Maynard, Nguyen, Robertson-Kraft, & Tognatta, 2012). However, the suggestion that these relationships are about reputation rather than recruitment makes sense partly based on the tendency for organizations not to measure the easy-to-track outcomes we would most readily associate with increased effectiveness: increased applicant numbers, increased enrollments, and, for some, increased retention and graduation rates. Instead, HEIs simply choose not to measure, leading to the
conclusion that perhaps recruitment is not the central motivation to engage with college access NPOs.

The other piece of evidence to support this argument is that a number of HEIs chose to continue relationships even in the face of a documented lack of success (e.g. HEI A, HEI U, HEI X). HEI X, a moderately selective private institution that severed ties with an association and then re-engaged later pointed out that “maybe it was us [the HEI]” not the Association. This willingness to shoulder the blame for a lack of success in achieving higher numbers of applicants/enrollees speaks to the HEI’s greater interest in appearing a certain way (i.e., as an institution committed to diversity and access), even at the cost of throwing money away through ineffective recruitment. Similarly, HEI U’s choice to end an unsuccessful relationship with one NPO only to immediately engage with another similarly structured NPO, points to the institution’s proportionately greater interest in appearing to be taking action than in achieving specific results.

If relationships between HEIs and NPOs do not warrant measurement or evaluation and are not ended when found to be lacking, then perhaps these interactions are instead “signals to authorities that universities are acting in good faith” with respect to the goals of college access and diversity (Siegel, 2010, p. 100). Siegel’s phrasing has a great deal in common with Oliver’s (1990) explanation of legitimacy, in which she writes, “pressures motivate organizations to increase their legitimacy in order to appear in agreement with the prevailing norms, rules, beliefs or expectations of external constituents” (p. 246). These pseudo-relationships make a great deal more sense when seen through the lens of a quest for legitimacy masquerading as a quest for efficiency.
This research suggests that HEIs may believe that an enhanced reputation has a value that surpasses even the financial gains realized by lowering the overall costs of recruitment. Generating enhanced legitimacy through affiliation with an NPO may inoculate an HEI against charges from both external and internal constituents that it is not doing enough to attract and recruit students of these kinds without actually leading to larger numbers of “expensive” students on campus. An HEI’s affiliation with an NPO that has a reputation for serving particular groups of underrepresented students, for instance, may generate a sort of halo effect for the HEI. Institutions may therefore be able, through association with an NPO, reap the benefit of a reputational boost without the downside of the increased expense. With these findings this study builds on Furquim and Glasener’s (2016) work by suggesting a possible mechanism through which relationships fulfill the latent function of reputational enhancement, as distinct from their manifest function (increased representation of particular student populations).

Transacting literal and symbolic goods. This study suggests that these largely “transactional” ties between HEIs and NPOs – both formal and informal – may represent the exchange of symbolic goods in addition to the exchange of more concrete ones (Bowen et al., 2010). HEIs directly provide NPOs’ students with expert knowledge and guidance about college processes in exchange for the opportunity to recruit these students. Through this interaction, HEIs’ willingness to meet with students may confer a certain degree of legitimacy on the NPO. This may be because colleges are seen to have many choices of where to recruit, so in choosing a particular NPO (and by extension their students) the HEI is telegraphing a message regarding the value of the NPO, its mission,
its staff, and its students. Similarly, the NPO’s willingness to be associated with the HEI confers legitimacy on the HEI, as several HEI representatives noted. Further symbolic exchanges that benefit both HEI and NPO are certainly plausible; recall that the Director of Admission at HEI U pointed out that the departure of a well-connected staff member to a nonprofit resulted in an enhancement of HEI U’s overall network. Figure 10 depicts an exchange of literal and symbolic goods.

![Figure 10: Literal and symbolic exchange of goods between HEI and NPO.](image)

This exchange of prestige and legitimacy is in keeping with the conceptual framework set forth by Furquim and Glasener (2016) in their quasi-experimental study of the effect of QuestBridge on socioeconomic diversity at partner colleges. Though their study found “no evidence that QuestBridge fulfills a desirable latent function” of prestige
maximization for its partners, nor that it fulfills the manifest function of increasing socioeconomic diversity, the findings explicated here do suggest that prestige maximization and legitimacy-building are factors motivating relationship formation (Furquim & Glasener, 2016, n.p.). Following the logic laid out by Furquim and Glasener (2016), it may be that while achieving a level of efficiency in the recruitment of diverse students is the manifest function for which relationships are formed, the latent function may be increasing legitimacy – or the efficient generation of legitimacy. As Bowen et al. (2010) suggested, “[t]he payoffs from engagement, particularly of the transactional and transitional types, are largely in the form of enhanced firm legitimacy” (p. 311).

**Relationships Exploit NPOs’ Contextual Knowledge**

Data generated in this study suggest that the reasons for which HEIs form relationships with NPOs are primarily exploitative ones (March, 1991), but that there are both overt and subtle forms of exploitation in use. **This study’s findings suggested** four common and relatively overt reasons for which HEIs seek to form relationships with NPOs: HEIs believe that doing so could: improve their access to potential applicants; build trust through association; fill critical gaps in knowledge, experience or preparation for students and parents; and address demographic shifts. Each of these reasons can be viewed as exploitive in that they comport with March’s (1991) definition of exploitation as including “such things as refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, and execution” (p. 71). In essence, exploitation is related to an organization’s ability to effectively capitalize on what it already knows, refining its existing practices to achieve efficiency.
More subtly, HEIs are exploiting what they know to be NPOs’ strong ties to students, families, and communities in order to enhance HEIs’ admissions offices ability to do what they do best: recruit students. In addition, HEIs are leveraging relationships to gain access to context-specific knowledge that NPOs are perceived to possess. This knowledge is perceived to have potential to improve HEIs’ marketing efforts in order to appeal to audiences (e.g., Hispanic students) with whom the NPO was familiar but with which the HEI had less experience (e.g., HEI A, HEI C, HEI P, HEI X). HEIs also characterized this knowledge as useful in providing critical information as to the major issues and challenges that students face (HEI R), largely to allow HEIs to better address these concerns in personal conversations, presentations, marketing materials, targeted financial aid initiatives, and other enrollment-related activities.

Based on the need to strike a balance between the pursuits of exploitation and exploration in order to maintain “system survival and prosperity” (March, 1991, p. 71), as described in the literature, I hypothesized that HEIs might adopt a two-pronged strategy. Some relationships would represent a “sure thing,” guaranteeing a certain acceptable minimum level of success (i.e., in applicants and enrollees). Other relationships would represent “pie in the sky” endeavors that may or may not produce results, but could be ended and/or reevaluated without trouble or too much cost, and might produce useful learnings, even if they did not directly and immediately produce more deposits from enrolling students. The first would be classified as exploitation, in March’s (1991) terminology, the latter as exploration. That this two-pronged hypothesis was not born out may be related to the relative dearth of concrete numerical goals among these HEIs, as
well as a dearth of data on NPOs’ results. As noted earlier, the lack of both measurable goals and mechanisms for evaluation suggest that legitimacy, rather than efficiency, is the main motivation to form relationships. Similarly, that these relationships do not have specific aims and goals attached to them may suggest that they are, by their very nature, intended as exploratory efforts rather than exploitative ones.

Most importantly, the extent to which these relationships comport with and extend the literature devoted to the exploration aspect of organizational learning cannot be assessed by this study because such an assessment would require a longitudinal examination of the phenomenon. Data collected here can only suggest that HEIs may be interested in relationships with NPOs at least in part because they believe – generally without evidence – that the relationships possess long-term potential to not only build a pipeline of applicants that more efficiently funnels students to the institution but also to play a role in enhancing institutional reputation.

The relationships explored in this study are notable in that none of them appear to be an “either-or” forced choice between exploration and exploitation at any given moment. HEI representatives’ descriptions of these relationships generally left open the possibility that the relationship could serve exploratory purposes. That is, no HEI intimated that a relationship was valuable only within the context of a single admissions cycle and many signaled a hope that the relationship would have power to set in motion a virtuous cycle or improve recruitment in some unspecified way in future cycles. This is suggestive of the possibility that HEIs may optimistically view relationships as exploitive and exploratory at the same time: relationships can be understood as HEIs attempting to
use NPOs as tools to simultaneously invent and refine practices associated with their work (e.g., recruitment of students).

Great Variety and Little Overlap in College Access NPOs

This study illustrates two particularly notable tendencies with respect to how universities and colleges think about college access organizations. First, HEIs display a wide range of understandings of what counts as a college access organization. Second, there is a notable lack of overlap in the organizations with which study HEIs have relationships, even despite similarities across HEIs, particularly with respect to location (Pennsylvania) and selectivity (a preponderance of moderately selective private HEIs).

HEIs’ wide-ranging definitions of what constitutes a college access organization align with the literature in the sense that college-going behaviors are influenced by a diverse array of underlying factors and the entities that address these factors are, as a consequence, equally diverse (Perna, 2002). College access programs may address financial issues, including applying for financial aid and scholarships, giving scholarships, or enhancing students and families’ general knowledge. Organizations may provide SAT/ACT test prep; support academic preparation by offering study skills training, remedial instruction, or enrichment; offer college tours, fairs and campus visits; or provide nonacademic supports such as counseling, social skills development, or job placement, among many other possibilities (Perna, 2002).

Because HEIs understand that preparation for college is multifaceted, encompassing a range of elements from the academic to the social, they include in their definitions of “college access organization” those entities that offer anything that appears
college related. For the field of college access at large, this has both advantages and
drawbacks. These findings suggest that HEIs are agnostic as to the type(s) of entity with
which they work and may mean that effective organizations, regardless of type, will not
be given preference when HEIs are seeking relationships, or when those NPOs approach
an HEI. Accepting all entities that seek partnership is distinctly void of strategy. Lacking
criteria for picking and choosing, HEIs could easily waste time and resources pursuing or
at least welcoming interactions with ineffective organizations, a development that
comports with what March (1991) would likely characterize as “exploration.” Indeed,
Furquim and Glasener (2016), in their study of the nonprofit access organization
QuestBridge, have suggested that with “a variety of complementary initiatives…[aimed
at accomplishing the same thing, HEIs] run the risk of duplicating efforts” (n.p). As
March (1991) again points out, “adaptive systems that engage in exploration to the
exclusion of exploitation are likely to find that they suffer the costs of experimentation
without gaining many of its benefits” (p. 71).

Widespread Interest But Not Yet “An Imperative”

Of the 25 institutions selected for this study, 18 had at least one relationship with
at least one nonprofit organization that they considered a college access organization,
even if the relationship consisted of a once-yearly bus trip. Across the 18 institutions, 97
different NPOs were named. These findings are consistent with the burgeoning interest in
purposeful relationships across organizations and sectors that has been documented in
literature rooted in fields as diverse as management (e.g., Googins & Rochlin, 2000),
nonprofits (e.g., Guo & Acar, 2005; Tsasis, 2009), higher education (e.g., Eckel &
Hartley, 2008; Kezar, 2005; Kezar et al., 2010); government (e.g., Andrews & Entwistle, 2010); and the nexus of nonprofits and business (e.g., Austin, 2000; Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009). Institutions in this study that did not engage in such arrangements expressed interest in doing so at some point in the future, or wished to do so if it were not cost prohibitive. Even institutions that reported that they had no relationships because they had no particular need to diversify their student populations expressed interest. This interest – even if the face of not actually needing to accomplish what these relationships are ostensibly for, which was the belief of at least six HEIs in the study – is striking because it begs the question of what value these relationships hold for HEIs if they are not strictly necessary.

In his book examining the LEAD program, a partnership among numerous HEIs to encourage a more diverse group of students to enter the field of business, David Siegel (2010) argues that

[a]lthough engagement has been an important part of the legacy of American higher education, pressures and demands have never been greater for universities to respond to changing societal interests and needs, including those related to diversity and inclusion… These pressures are both exogenous (coming from higher education’s external constituencies) and endogenous (emanating from faculty, staff, and students…)…What we are observing at the beginning of the twenty-first century in American higher education is something approximating an engagement imperative. This imperative is a crystallized version of the academy’s historical commitments to and philosophical orientations toward society. (p. 29)

In contrast to what Siegel argues, this study finds that among the less selective HEIs explored here, there is not an imperative to collaborate. There is merely an interest. This divergence suggests that selective institutions and less selective ones may experience exogenous/endogenous pressures differently, resulting in different responses.
That seven of the study HEIs chose not to participate in relationships despite acknowledging their potential for solving problems the institutions face, suggests that relationships have not yet reached the level of “an imperative” at least in part because as a strategy they have not yet achieved the minimum acceptable threshold of demonstrated efficiency for all HEIs. That four of five of the inclusive HEIs in the study maintained no relationships is further evidence that relationships with NPOs are not an imperative, and that they may have greater relevance – and hold greater interest – for certain subsets of the higher education sector.

Implications for Practice

The focus of this study has been on HEIs’ motivations to form relationships with NPOs, but the implications for practice suggested by these findings are not limited to higher education institutions. NPOs seeking to forge closer ties to institutions on behalf of the students they serve may also benefit by considering some of the implications discussed here.

Across a relatively small sample of 25 study HEIs 97 different responses were given to the question “What organizations so you have relationships with for college access?” Only 15 college access organizations were mentioned twice or more, and the top six most frequently mentioned entities are a scholarship granting foundation, a private school, an association of HEIs, and three charter networks. This is a notable lack of overlap among HEIs with regard to the organizations they work with, particularly for HEIs that are all located in Pennsylvania. These data suggest that HEIs are agnostic as to the types of college access organizations with which they engage. Furthermore, HEIs
appear to have a low bar with respect to what NPOs are expected to accomplish. As long as NPOs are understood to have some function related to college-going behaviors and practices, then they seem to have a chance at forging ties to an HEI. The implication of this is positive for NPOs that seek relationships – it suggests a relatively low bar for entry – but potentially negative for HEIs that may indiscriminately invest time or money in NPOs. This is particularly troubling in light of the lack of evaluation HEIs perform (only six measured anything related to partnership). Partnering widely may also have the drawback of diminishing returns, which Furquim and Glasener (2016) pointed out as a possible side effect of having numerous initiatives that address the same core issue (e.g., targeting URMs or low-income students).

Generic nonprofits are the most frequently mentioned type of organization, and yet other than the scholarship-granting organization Pittsburgh Promise, no single nonprofit has formed relationships with more than two HEIs in the sample. This finding has implications for practice first, in that a small number of organizations are dominating partnerships in the non-elite HEI market in Pennsylvania, most notably in this study, charter schools and networks. Second, it implies that traditional student-service oriented nonprofits, while important to HEIs as partner organizations, are not as important to HEIs as charters, for reasons as yet unexplored. At this exploratory stage I can offer only conjecture as to why this is the case, yet the implications for college access organizations are somewhat stark: HEIs may be less likely to pursue or agree to relationships with NPOs than with charter schools. This in turn suggests that NPOs with capacity and interest in relationships with HEIs may need to develop new or different strategies to
entice HEIs with promises of both efficient recruitment of students and meaningful additions to institutional legitimacy.

At a minimum, this study suggests that HEIs should more clearly articulate their goals around enrollment, both in general and for specific populations they seek to attract and enroll. HEIs and NPOs would both benefit from an explicit articulation of outcomes for their work together, whether these are numerical targets for students applying, enrolling, retaining and graduating, or whether they are goals related to the creation of joint programming such as summer bridge programs, college application boot camps, interview preparation workshops, tutoring, or other college-oriented events and activities.

In a related vein, this study suggests the lack of good data is a substantial barrier to relationship formation, evaluation and success for both CBOs that hope to form relationships in order to achieve their aims and HEIs that seek or are open to relationships with CBOs. Colleges and universities, especially those that are tuition-driven, need to be assured that the effort (and the associated financial costs) of engaging with a nonprofit will be realized as concrete steps toward a particular institutional goal (e.g., an increase, year over year, in percentage of URM students, or possibly an increase in retained URM students year-over-year). A desire for assurances of success, however, is quite impossible to fulfill unless the HEIs themselves are very clear, concrete, and transparent about what it is they would like to achieve.

HEIs should have the ability not only to collect meaningful data for the purpose of evaluating their own actions, but also for the purpose of judging potential partners’ fit with HEIs’ institutional aims. NPOs should work to develop ongoing data collection
processes that have potential to look backward to track where a student started; document the value contributed by the NPO; and look forward to collect data such as where the student enrolled, what major she chose, whether she graduated and in how long, etc. Clearer definitions of success coupled with improved data fluency and improved record keeping at both the HEI and the NPO might help to keep HEIs from wasting valuable – and in many cases, quite limited – resources on NPOs unlikely to be able to help the HEI attain its goals. Such data collection practices and transparency around services offered could also help HEIs better assess the likelihood of a match between HEI and NPO.

These data suggest that those HEIs that want to leverage relationships with NPOs to successfully achieve specific goals around enrollment, access and diversity should aim at transformational, rather than transactional relationships. For transformational relationships, both partnering entities must not only clearly articulate their goals, but also delineate their mutual expectations and responsibilities. Furthermore, they must encode in their interactions interactive processes around decision-making, communication, evaluation, process and organization, and membership (Gajda, 2004; Frey et al., 2006; Kezar, 2005, 2006). This study also implies that NPOs hoping to develop relationships with HEIs to drive their own organizational goals should play to institutions’ interests in efficiency, stability, legitimacy, both for the immediate cycle and for the longer term ("developing a pipeline"), by emphasizing how they can contribute to these interests. This may be a more helpful approach to developing than trying to leverage the notion of a "shared goal."
With regard to specific subsets of HEIs, in this study I found that only one of the five inclusive institutions in the study had relationships, and the one that did have relationships had only one: with an association. Most of these institutions were concerned about enrollment, looking for students to enroll, and also thinking about ways to attract and retain students. This finding may reflect the fact that this sector does not see efficiency or legitimacy as a potential value in relationships with NPOs — inclusive institutions are already the most diverse in terms of Pell and URMs. Alternatively, this finding could suggest that inclusive HEIs may be an untapped reservoir of partners, albeit a particularly price-sensitive one. There may be an as-yet unrealized market for an NPO or a collection of NPOs that cater specifically to middle-of-the-road students for middle-of-the-road institutions, particularly if connecting these groups can be accomplished at a price point that is not painful to the HEI. If some of the appeal that charter schools hold for HEIs is that they help students with the “through” aspect of “to and through college,” then this new NPO or collection of NPOs should adopt a similar stance of focusing on these factors, thereby increasing students’ success while also decreasing the burden that under-prepared students can place on HEIs. It suggests that there may be something about charter schools and networks that are more attractive to HEIs. Other NPOs may be able to emulate some of the elements that HEI named as attractive features of working with charter schools and networks, particularly the strong counselor support of students after students’ enrollment in college.

One final, and very practical, implication of this study is that there may be a market for an easy-to-use, widely available framework or assessment tool that could be
used to both build and evaluate collaborations between HEIs and NPOs. A framework such as this could be used by both entities to assess whether their interests, capacities, and existing structures (etc.) align before embarking on a partnership requiring time, effort, and a financial commitment. Furthermore, it could be used to assess the extent to which the entities have the interest and capacity to engage in a true partnership as opposed to a “less formal dyadic linkage” (Whetten 1981, p. 5).

While we cannot be not sure of the benefits of partnership specifically with respect to college access related aims, literature from other fields indicates that true partnerships may be able to drive meaningful change, particularly in the context of socially oriented projects (e.g., Selsky & Parker, 2005). HEI-NPO relationships for college access may not be being used to their fullest potential quite yet, despite holding a great deal of interest for HEIs.

**Directions for Future Research**

This study suggests a number of directions for research that may improve general understanding of how educational partnerships operate, as well as how their potential can be maximized. Most obviously, a similar look at the nonprofit side of the HEI-NPO equation would address questions of the distribution of partnerships and relationships among NPOs as well as what goals NPOs hope to achieve through relationships with HEIs. This area of inquiry could also benefit from a more in-depth, case-study style examination of the dynamics between both entities involved in a given relationship, including but not limited to how each entity’s goals are translated into motivations and then into action.
My focus exclusively on four-year higher education institutions means that the perspective of two-year colleges is largely absent from this study. Future research should seek to understand what kinds of relationships these institutions – which served 30% of first-time, degree-seeking undergraduates in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b) – have, or seek to build, and the aims and outcomes of these relationships. Studying these HEIs, with their significant differences in funding, student population, course offerings, selectivity, and perceived prestige as compared with four-year HEIs could considerably refine and even alter the implications drawn from this study.

Furthermore, while this study has contributed some very broad understanding of what motivates non-elite HEIs to work with nonprofits to address issues of college access and diversity, as well as some understanding of how widespread such relationships are, it has not contributed to understanding how sectors of higher education differentially experience and employ relationships to address issues of access and student diversity. Future research could develop knowledge about the particulars of how certain categories of HEIs – for instance public institutions, which are not well represented in this study – use partnerships to achieve goals. Such a study could answer questions pertaining to whether more selective institutions are more likely than other HEIs to engage in contract or MOU-based relationships, or whether there are other patterns of matching taking place between HEIs and NPOs.

Many researchers have pointed out the dearth of longitudinal studies of partnerships and the limitations on knowledge this imposes upon the field (see for
instance Parker & Selsky, 2004). A longitudinal case study project researching relationships between HEIs and NPOs would shed a great deal of light on how these not only form and are maintained, but how they may evolve over time, particularly in response to variables that played a role in this study, such as changes in staff and leadership, budget constraints and financial concerns, shifting institutional priorities, and demographics changes. A longitudinal, nation-wide, questionnaire-based study could uncover whether ties between HEIs and other entities are on the rise, as some researchers have suggested (e.g., Kezar, 2011; Siegel, 2010). More importantly, such a study could illuminate whether there are discernible and statistically significant patterns to these relationships across institutional categories and characteristics such as selectivity, geography, graduation rate, financial aid policies, institutional control, etc.

If enhanced legitimacy is indeed the aim of these relationships, organizational learning suggests that given the uncertainty of the advantages to enhanced reputation and legitimacy relationships are a largely exploratory strategy (uncertain returns; long time horizon), rather than an exploitative (certain returns; shorter time horizon) one. The design of this study was such that it could not measure long-term returns to reputation building and increased legitimacy. A reputation as a legitimate actor may have both short and long-term benefits to an HEI, but this study was not designed to measure reputation or changes over time. Future case study research of a longitudinal nature could help answer questions about the extent to which HEIs engage with NPOs for the purpose of enhancing institutional legitimacy over time, as well as the returns they expect to receive.
as a result. Such a study could also shed light on institutions’ expectations with respect to
the returns to a strategy of exploitation versus exploration.

Gajda (2004) argued that collaborating groups will progress through stages, and
suggested that only in passing through subsequent stages could groups move toward
effectiveness. While consideration of the effectiveness of these relationships fell outside
the scope of this study, the progressive stages are an important element of relationship
development. None of my analysis suggests that HEIs experienced their work with
nonprofits as progressive, that they had aims to grow closer as entities over time, or that
they hoped to generate institutional change through external partnerships. If effectiveness
is predicated on moving through these stages, however, and HEIs do not view these
relationships as having potential to progress, then, per Gajda (2004), these relationships
may never be effective, whatever the specific goals. Future research should address not
only the extent to which relationships progress through these stages, but also the extent to
which progression of relationships is important to partnering entities.

Among HEIs, underdeveloped understanding of the formal elements of
partnership suggests that another fruitful avenue for inquiry might be to take a
practitioner inquiry approach (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) to implementing a
partnership framework such as the one developed by Marek et al. (2015). A qualitative
study of this kind would have the power to answer the question, “What happens when we
try to implement the elements of formal partnership on an existing relationship between
an HEI and CBO?” Such a study would extend the body of work developed by Professor
Adrianna Kezar, whose studies of partnership have focused on “campuses that showed
exemplary progress” to foster collaboration (Kezar, 2005, p. 833) or already illustrate “high levels of collaborative activities” (Kezar, 2006, p. 806) but have not focused on how the imposition of a partnership model influences the functioning of cross-organizational relationships. Such an approach would also have the potential to contribute to knowledge of how relationships develop and function.

The presence of charter schools and charter school networks as two of the most common organizational partner types in this study merits further investigation. What this suggests is that charters may have a better understanding of how to leverage relationships with HEIs to address mutual goals around college access, or that they may be in some way more attractive partners for HEIs. Further research focusing on how charter schools and networks employ relationships in the service of their students may uncover why charters are attractive partners for HEIs, why they are more accessible to HEIs, or other factors or practices that charter schools/networks use that make relationships more appealing or more likely. Further examination through the conceptual lenses applied in this study could also uncover whether charter organizations are leading the pack to establish connections and thereby securing advantages in admission (and along other dimensions) for their students even as the charters improve their own legitimacy and standing as organizations.

Finally, though this study’s research questions revolve around motivation and institutional goals, the issue out of which these questions grew is whether relationships with nonprofits lead to more students from underrepresented and low-income backgrounds. The analyses in this study cannot address this question, as they do not
reveal enrollment patterns in the absence of relationships. Future research should provide more formal evaluation of the overall efficiency and benefits/costs of relationships specifically for the project of college access.

**Conclusion**

Putting these findings in the larger context of our national discussion about college access, true collaborations between HEIs and NPOs are likely uncommon in the overall population of U.S. HEIs. Nothing in this study of less selective institutions rose to the level of a true collaboration or partnership and the same is true of what I saw in my years at a highly selective institution administering a contract-based relationship with a college access nonprofit. Regardless of the terminology applied to the interactions between HEIs and NPOs, this study suggests that the interactions or pseudo-relationships depicted here represent stunted possibilities and a certain amount insufficiently realized potential. Rather than suggesting that these relationships may be without merit (a claim for which I have not collected data), I frame these findings as suggestive of growth potential for relationships between HEIs and NPOs. The growth I refer to is not a mere increase in the number of linkages between entities, but rather an increase in the extent to which these linkages conform to the well-established body of literature that explains how entities can maximize their productivity when jointly addressing a shared concern. This is a fruitful area for research and for practice.

In the coming years, closer ties between nonprofits and colleges may be less a tool than a necessity. Nonprofits may increasingly be relied on by students, families and schools to mitigate the problems caused by nationally increasing student-to-counselor
ratios, which went from 457:1 in 2010-11 to 491:1 in 2013-14 (the recommended ratio is 250:1) (American Counseling Association, n.d.; American School Counselor Association, n.d.). Continuing declines in the availability of college counselors could push families to seek college-related information from other sources, leading to an increased demand among students and families for nonprofits (and for profits) with expertise on college admissions. For HEIs located in states like Pennsylvania (with its declining numbers of high school graduates), HEI-NPO relationships may become more important as a mechanism to grapple with increasing pressures on institutional financial models, demographic changes, and the basic need to fill seats. It follows that HEIs, who once relied upon visits with guidance counselors to achieve contact with promising students to recruit, may increasingly shift their attention to nonprofit partners.
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Appendix A: Emails #1 & #2 to solicit participation in the study

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CATHERINE MCMANUS <cmcmanus@gse.upenn.edu>  
To:  

Dear [Name],

I hope this note finds you well and enjoying at least a little rest this summer. I am reaching out to you today to ask if you or someone from your staff would be willing to speak with me about [redacted] relationships with nonprofit college access organizations.

I'm a former admissions officer and I'm doing my Ed.D. dissertation on higher ed institutions' (4 year, nonprofit, public & private) motivations to form relationships with college access nonprofits (e.g., Steppingstone, QuestBridge, 10,000 Degrees, etc.). I'm looking for admissions people who work on issues of college access to do confidential, one-hour interviews, likely over the phone or Skype/Google.

The benefit for participating institutions is that I will share findings with you, which amounts to unique insight into how your peers "do" college access, but without having to conduct the research yourselves! It may also give folks in your office ideas or help refine best practices, but also simply helps understand the larger landscape, especially since it includes public institutions as well as private ones, as well as those that are more and less selective.

Please let me know if you are interested. It would be such a pleasure to include your perspective in this important work on college access, diversity, and cross-organizational relationships.

You can reach me via email (cmcmanus@gse.upenn.edu) or on my cell. [redacted]. I look forward to the chance to speak with you!

Best regards,
Cat

[Cat McManus, Ed.D.  
cmcmanus@gse.upenn.edu  
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership  
University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education]

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CATHERINE MCMANUS <cmcmanus@gse.upenn.edu>  
To:  

Dear [Name],

I hope summer is treating you well! I am just following up on my email of a couple weeks ago (below) regarding potential participation in my dissertation study on relationships between higher education institutions and nonprofit, nongovernmental college access organizations.

I hope to include a variety of perspectives in this study, so I am reaching out again.

You can reach me at cmcmanus@gse.upenn.edu or on my cell phone at [redacted].

My best,
Cat McManus

[Quoted text hidden]
### Appendix B: Table of participant and institutional pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Urban-ness</th>
<th>Selectivity</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<td>HEI A</td>
<td>Town</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>Dominic</td>
<td>Senior Assistant Director of Admissions &amp; Coordinator of Multicultural Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI B</td>
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<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Director of Admissions</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEI C</td>
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<td>Moderately selective</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Dr. Tim, Amanda, Michael</td>
<td>President; Multicultural Recruiter for Partnerships; Director of International and Military Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI D</td>
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<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Associate Vice President for Strategic Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI E</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Meredith</td>
<td>Enrollment Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEI G</td>
<td>City</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>Assistant Director of Admissions &amp; Coordinator of Multicultural Student Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI H</td>
<td>Suburb</td>
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<td>Betsy</td>
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<td>Peter</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEI J</td>
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<td>Justin</td>
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<td>Max</td>
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<td>HEI U</td>
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<td>Director of Admissions</td>
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<td>William</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEI Y</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>Albert, Maria</td>
<td>Director of Admissions; Senior Associate Director of Admissions</td>
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</table>
Appendix C: Annotated survey/interview instrument, ex. #1

This survey should be completed by the Dean of Admissions, the Director of Admissions, or the Director of Diversity, Equity and Access (or the equivalent).

This survey asks questions about your institution’s relationships with college access focused community-based organizations (CBOs). It should not take more than 15 minutes to fill out. Though the survey lists your institution’s name, this information will only be used only for statistical purposes to determine your institution’s type (e.g., public, private, 2-year, HBCU, women’s college, etc.). You and your institution will remain anonymous in final analysis.

Thank you for your thoughtful participation! If you have questions or concerns, please e-mail Cat McManus at cemcmanus@gse.upenn.edu

Institution Name: (e.g., Dartmouth College)

1. Does the admissions office at your institution work with any other organization(s) to help improve access to (or enrollment) in your institution?
   - Yes.
   - No.
   If "no," skip to questions 17 & 18.

2. If yes – how many of these organizations are:
   - Part of your institution but external to the admissions office? (free response numerical entry)
   - Entities external to your institution? (free response numerical entry)
   - Other (please describe).

3. Of those entities that are external to your institution:
   - How many are governmental agencies (e.g., TRIO programs, GEAR-UP)? (free response numerical entry)
   - How many are non-profit, non-governmental entities (local, regional, or national)? (examples include QuestBridge, 10,000 Degrees, uASPIRE, College Horizons) (free response numerical entry)
   - Are there other categories of entities within which your institution forms relationships to advance college access? (optional free response text entry)

4. Of the entities that are non-profit and non-governmental, how many focus on working with low-income students, first generation students, and/or students from backgrounds underrepresented in American higher education? (free response numerical entry)

5. Please list the names of all these entities. (free response text entry)

6. A relationship with a nonprofit, nongovernmental college access organization may take many forms. It may be formalized through a contractual obligation, a handshake agreement, a memorandum of understanding (MOU), or may simply
be an informal “understanding.” For the purposes of this survey, a “relationship” with a CBO is one that: a) is aimed at addressing issues of college access in some way, b) is sustained over time (or is intended to be); c) is recognized internally as a relationship of some kind. Of your relationships with the entities you listed above, how many have been in place for:
- Less than one year? (free response numerical entry)
- About one year? (free response numerical entry)
- 2-4 years? (free response numerical entry)
- 5-7 years? (free response numerical entry)
- more than 7 years? (free response numerical entry)
- Other time period (free response text entry)

7. Is there a fee or payment associated with your relationship with ANY of the entities listed above (i.e., do you receive an invoice of any kind)?
   - Yes.
   - No.
   - I’m not sure.

8. Is there a formal agreement with ANY of the organizations listed above with which you have a relationship?
   - [ ] Yes, but I’m not sure what form the agreement takes.
   - [ ] No.
   - [ ] I’m not sure.

9. How are the relationships between your institution and the organizations listed above TYPICALLY initiated?
   - My institution seeks relationships.
   - The nonprofit organization seeks partnership with us.
   - A third party puts us in contact (please explain). (free response text entry)
   - It varies a lot by relationship (please explain). (free response text entry)
   - Other (free response text entry).
   - I’m not sure.

10. Please rank the three most important reasons your institution has relationships with the organizations you listed above (1 = “most important, 2 = “next most important,” 3 = “third most important”).
   - My institution is required by law to have relationships with CBOs.
   - To develop a pipeline of students from CBOs and achieve stability, predictability, and dependability in recruiting underrepresented populations of interest.
   - To pursue mutually beneficial goals with CBO partner(s).
   - To give back to and engage with our local community.
   - To establish a reputation as an institution that is working to address issues of college access.
   - To be in keeping with the spirit of affirmative action legislation in American
higher education.
- To learn from CBOs “what works” with particular populations.
- To reach new markets (i.e., particular populations, geographic locations).
- To meet general institutional goals with respect to college access specifically for low-income, first generation or underrepresented students in higher education. To maintain competitive advantage over peer institutions.
- To recruit underrepresented students more efficiently (i.e., in terms of time, money, and/or effort) than through direct visitation to high schools, fairs, and other events.
- Other (please specify) (free response text entry)

11. Please rank the **three least important** reasons your institution has relationships with the organizations you listed above (with 1 being “least important”).
- My institution is required by law to have relationships with CBOs.
- To develop a pipeline of students from CBOs and achieve stability, predictability, and dependability in recruiting underrepresented populations of interest.
- To pursue mutually beneficial goals with CBO partner(s).
- To give back to and engage with our local community.
- To establish a reputation as an institution that is working to address issues of college access.
- To be in keeping with the spirit of affirmative action legislation in American higher education.
- To learn from CBOs “what works” with particular populations.
- To reach new markets (i.e., particular populations, geographic locations).
- To meet general institutional goals with respect to college access specifically for low-income, first generation or underrepresented students in higher education. To maintain competitive advantage over peer institutions.
- To recruit underrepresented students more efficiently (i.e., in terms of time, money, and/or effort) than through direct visitation to high schools, fairs, and other events.

12. Indicate the extent to which targeting each of the following groups of students is a goal of the relationships with organizations identified above (please indicate 1 to 5, with 1 being “least important” and 5 being “most important”):
- First-generation students
- Low-income students
- Male students
- Female students
- Students from underrepresented (U.S.) ethnic and minority groups
- Students from specific geographic locations in the US
- Students from specific geographic locations outside the US
- Students for specific majors, schools or programs (e.g., female engineers, artists, STEM students, etc.) (free response text box)
- Other (free response text box)

13. Which of the relationships indicated above is **most important** to your
14. Have **ANY** of your institution’s relationships with CBOs come to an end?
   - Yes.
   - No.
   - I’m not sure.

15. If yes, what factors led to the relationship(s) ending? (check all that apply)
   - Some have ended.
   - Contract ended.
   - Too expensive.
   - Relationship not meeting institutional needs/goals.
   - Change in college access strategy.
   - Had issues of some kind with the CBO (Please describe) (free response text entry).
   - Too hard to manage from within admissions (please describe) (free response text entry).
   - Other (free response text entry).

16. Is there a single person in the admissions office responsible for coordinating (one, some or all) relationships with the organizations listed above?
   - Yes, s/he coordinates all relationships.
   - Yes, s/he coordinates most relationships.
   - No.
   - No, individual admission officers coordinate their own relationships.
   - No; the coordinator is located outside the admissions office (please explain) (free response text entry field).
   - I’m not sure.

17. **Primary survey respondent**, please tell us: What is your role in the admissions office?
   - Dean of Admission (or equivalent)
   - Director of Admission (or equivalent)
   - Director of Diversity, Equity, Access (or equivalent)
   - Other (free response text entry field)

18. Is there anything else you’d like us to know about your work with college access? (e.g., if you do not have relationships with CBOs, are you working to establish them? free response text field)

Thank you for your participation!
This survey should be completed by the Dean of Admissions, the Director of Admissions, or the Director of Diversity, Equity and Access (or the equivalent).

This survey asks questions about your institution’s relationships with college access focused community-based organizations (CBOs). It should not take more than 15 minutes to fill out. Though the survey lists your institution’s name, this information will only be used only for statistical purposes to determine your institution’s type (e.g., public, private, 2-year, HBCU, women’s college, etc.). You and your institution will remain anonymous in final analysis.

Thank you for your thoughtful participation! If you have questions or concerns, please email Cat McManus at cmcmanus@gse.upenn.edu

Institution Name: (e.g., Dartmouth College)

1. Does the admissions office at your institution work with any other organization(s) to help improve access to (or enrollment) in your institution?
   - Yes.
   - No.
   If “no,” skip to questions 17 & 18.

2. If yes – how many of these organizations are:
   - Part of your institution but external to the admissions office? (free response numerical entry)
   - Entities external to your institution? (free response numerical entry)
   - Other (please describe)

3. Of those entities that are external to your institution:
   - How many are governmental agencies (e.g., TRIO programs, GEAR-UP)? (free response numerical entry)
   - How many are non-profit, non-governmental entities (local, regional, or national)? (examples include QuestBridge, 10,000 degrees, uASPIRE, College Horizons) (free response numerical entry)
   - Are there other categories of entities within which your institution forms relationships to advance college access? (optional free response text entry)

4. Of the entities that are non-profit and non-governmental, how many focus on working with low-income students, first generation students, and/or students from backgrounds underrepresented in American higher education? (free response numerical entry)

5. Please list the names of all these entities (free response text entry)

6. A relationship with a nonprofit, nongovernmental college access organization may take many forms. It may be formalized through a contractual obligation, a handshake agreement, a memorandum of understanding (MOU), or may simply
be an informal “understanding.” For the purposes of this survey, a “relationship” with a CBO is one that: a) is aimed at addressing issues of college access in some way, b) is sustained over time (or is intended to be); c) is recognized internally as a relationship of some kind. Of your relationships with the entities you listed above, how many have been in place for:
- Less than one year? (free response numerical entry)
- About one year? (free response numerical entry)
- 2-4 years? (free response numerical entry)
- 5-7 years? (free response numerical entry)
- more than 7 years? (free response numerical entry)
- Other time period (free response text entry)

7. Is there a fee or payment associated with your relationship with ANY of the entities listed above (i.e., do you receive an invoice of any kind)?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I’m not sure

8. Is there a formal agreement with ANY of the organizations listed above with which you have a relationship?
   - Yes (Please describe: e.g., a contract, a memorandum of understanding [MOU], other) (free response text entry field)
   - Yes, but I’m not sure what form the agreement takes.
   - No.
   - I’m not sure.

9. How are the relationships between your institution and the organizations listed above TYPICALLY initiated?
   - My institution seeks relationships.
   - The nonprofit organization seeks partnership with us.
   - A third party puts us in contact (please explain). (free response text entry)
   - It varies a lot by relationship (please explain). (free response text entry)
   - Other (free response text entry).
   - I’m not sure.

10. Please rank the three most important reasons your institution has relationships with the organizations you listed above (1 = “most important, 2 = “next most important,” 3 = “third most important”).
    - My institution is required by law to have relationships with CBOs.
    - To develop a pipeline of students from CBOs and achieve stability, predictability, and dependability in recruiting underrepresented populations of interest.
    - To pursue mutually beneficial goals with CBO partner(s).
    - To give back to and engage with our local community.
    - To establish a reputation as an institution that is working to address issues of college access.
    - To be in keeping with the spirit of affirmative action legislation in American
higher education.
• To learn from CBOs “what works” with particular populations.
• To reach new markets (i.e., particular populations, geographic locations).
• To meet general institutional goals with respect to college access specifically for low-income, first generation or underrepresented students in higher education. To maintain competitive advantage over peer institutions.
• To recruit underrepresented students more efficiently (i.e., in terms of time, money, and/or effort) than through direct visitation to high schools, fairs, and other events.
• Other (please specify) (free response text entry)

11. Please rank the **three least important** reasons your institution has relationships with the organizations you listed above (with 1 being “least important”).
• My institution is required by law to have relationships with CBOs.
• To develop a pipeline of students from CBOs and achieve stability, predictability, and dependability in recruiting underrepresented populations of interest.
• To pursue mutually beneficial goals with CBO partner(s).
• To give back to and engage with our local community.
• To establish a reputation as an institution that is working to address issues of college access.
• To be in keeping with the spirit of affirmative action legislation in American higher education.
• To learn from CBOs “what works” with particular populations.
• To reach new markets (i.e., particular populations, geographic locations).
• To meet general institutional goals with respect to college access specifically for low-income, first generation or underrepresented students in higher education. To maintain competitive advantage over peer institutions.
• To recruit underrepresented students more efficiently (i.e., in terms of time, money, and/or effort) than through direct visitation to high schools, fairs, and other events.

12. Indicate the extent to which targeting each of the following groups of students is a goal of the relationships with organizations identified above (please indicate 1 to 5, with 1 being “least important” and 5 being “most important”):
• First-generation students
• Low-income students
• Male students
• Female students
• Students from underrepresented (U.S.) ethnic and minority groups
• Students from specific geographic locations in the US
• Students from specific geographic locations outside the US
• Students for specific majors, schools or programs (e.g., female engineers, artists, STEM students, etc.) (free response text box)
• Other (free response text box)

13. Which of the relationships indicated above is **most important** to your
institution’s college access work and why? (free response text entry field: name of organization & why)

14. Have ANY of your institution’s relationships with CBOs come to an end?
   • Yes.
   • No.
   • I’m not sure.

15. If yes, what factored into the relationship(s) ending? (check all that apply)
   • None have ended.
   • Contract ended.
   • Too expensive.
   • Relationship not meeting institutional needs/goals.
   • Change in college access strategy.
   • Had issues of some kind with the CBO (Please describe) (free response text entry).
   • Too hard to manage from within admissions (please describe) (free response text entry).
   • Other (free response text entry).

16. Is there a single person in the admissions office responsible for coordinating (one, some or all) relationships with the organizations listed above?
   • Yes, s/he coordinates all relationships.
   • Yes, s/he coordinates most relationships.
   • No.
   • No, individual admission officers coordinate their own relationships.
   • No, the coordinator is located outside the admissions office (please explain) (free response text entry field).
   • I’m not sure.

17. Primary survey respondent, please tell us: What is your role in the admissions office?
   • Dean of Admission (or equivalent)
   • Director of Admission (or equivalent)
   • Director of Diversity, Equity, Access (or equivalent)
   • Other (free response text entry field)

18. Is there anything else you’d like us to know about your work with college access? (e.g., if you do not have relationships with CBOs, are you working to establish them? free response text field)

Thank you for your participation!
Appendix D: IRB approval letter

Laura W Perra  
Attn: Catherine McManus  
permans@gse.upenn.edu  
lperna@gse.upenn.edu

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Laura W Perra  
TITLE: Relationships for College Access: What Motivates Higher Education Institutions to Partner with Community Based Organizations  
SPONSORING AGENCY: No Sponsor Number  
PROTOCOL #: 822811  
REVIEW BOARD: IRB #8

Dear Dr. Perra:

The above-referenced research proposal was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 13-Jul-2015. It has been determined that the proposal meets eligibility criteria for IRB review exemption authorized by 45 CFR 46.101, category 2.

This does not necessarily constitute authorization to initiate the conduct of a human subject research study. You are responsible for assuring other relevant committee approvals.

Consistent with the federal regulations, ongoing oversight of this proposal is not required. No continuing reviews will be required for this proposal. The proposal can proceed as approved by the IRB. This decision will not affect any funding of your proposal.

Please Note: The IRB must be kept apprised of any and all changes in the research that may have an impact on the IRB review mechanism needed for a specific proposal. You are required to notify the IRB if any changes are proposed in the study that might alter its IRB exempt status or HIPAA compliance status. New procedures that may have an impact on the risk-to-benefit ratio cannot be initiated until Committee approval has been given.

If your study is funded by an external agency, please retain this letter as documentation of the IRB’s determination regarding your proposal.

Please Note: You are responsible for assuring and maintaining other relevant committee approvals.

If you have any questions about the information in this letter, please contact the IRB administrative staff. Contact information is available at our website: http://www.upenn.edu/IRB/directory.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

David Heagerty
IRB Administrator