

Article

# Sustainable Justice: Community Connections, Lower Debt, and the Process of Becoming a Work College

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**Abstract:** This study presents the findings that emerged in a qualitative policy-oriented case study of an institution's transition to a work college in the United States of America. Researchers collected 32 individual interviews, along with other observational data and institutional archives to understand the appeal of federal policy and government investment in the institution's transition to a work college. From this data, two findings emerged that promoted the sustainability of the institution: Educational Justice Promotes Cultural Sovereignty and Academic Activism and Political Connections. What emerged in the analysis of the findings was that notions of access, affordability, dignity, sovereignty, and justice are all expressions of sustainability in higher education, which is one part of a societal ecosystem. The institution's movement toward a work college model created a more sustainable educational model that allowed the institution to access federal policies and government investment inclined toward employability, promote its community, and develop significant political connections and advocacy. Throughout the transition, the institution exhibited profound ethical vision of higher education. This ethical vision—justice through education—stretched beyond the boundaries of the institution and into its adjacent neighborhood, city, and nation.

**Keywords:** sustainable; justice; work; workforce development; partnerships; economic; work college; race; ethics; work education; social justice

## 1. Introduction

Sustainability remains a challenge in the United States of America's higher education model with the price of higher education rising nearly 25% from 2005 to 2015 even when adjusted for inflation [1]. Students and their families often absorb these costs and use student loans to meet the demands of rising costs [2]. The Federal Reserve Bank of New York [3] reported that outstanding student debt has topped \$1.16 trillion. Following the 2008 recession, the jobs market for many college graduates was difficult to enter [4], and was compounded by the weight of student loans and credit card debt that students accumulate through their college years [2]. The combined effect of these factors generates a unique policy environment around expensive education, employability, and student debt [5,6]. The combination of these factors appears to be unsustainable and pushing universities to more corporate-like behavior [7,8].

The majority of US citizens continue to perceive that higher education remains essential for gaining employment, despite pervasive price growth in higher education [8]. Significant financial debt often accompanies many college graduates, diminishing their ability to save. Meanwhile, employers face challenges soliciting and hiring capable college graduates, leading to a "potential, though debatable, skills shortage in certain fields" [9] (p. 6).

Vice President Biden remarked in a speech on workforce development that President Obama had commissioned him to review job-training programs in order “to provide workers with the skills they need to secure good jobs that are ready to be filled” [6] (p. 1). Obama’s commission was not limited to job training but also critically evaluated higher education’s role in workforce development (i.e., the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act of 2014) by promoting a more symbiotic relationship between higher education and employers. According to Van Noy and Cleary, this movement is a “call for improved labor market alignment” [9] (p. 1).

The work college model exists at an intersection between the aforementioned socio-political realities of expensive education, employability, and student debt. These factors suggest that an ethic of justice—that is, reciprocity, balance, and purpose in the sustainability of a higher education that benefits society—in the institution’s transition. Although the work college model does not immediately address the questions that emerge around sustainable patterns of higher education, revenue-diverse funding strategies, and workforce development, it leads one to consider other alternative expressions of higher education in the United States of America that can mitigate cost while enhancing missional sustainability while benefitting individual students and the surrounding community. These concerns lead to a case study on one college’s transition to the work college model, guided by the question: “How do notions of justice to individuals and community influence one institution’s transition to a work college?” What emerged in the analysis of the findings was that notions of access, affordability, dignity, sovereignty, and justice are all expressions of sustainability for higher education, which is one part of a societal ecosystem.

In the subsequent sections, this article will explore how notions of justice emerged in a policy-oriented case study that examined an institution’s transition to a work college. In order to clearly communicate, the next section addresses in detail the work college model, funding process, and history. The section following the work college model outlines the specific methods, timeline, and participant information related to the research process. Following the Methods section, the article continues with an exploration of the two findings of the study: Educational Justice Promotes Cultural Sovereignty and Academic Activism and Political Connections. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion and conclusion of the study in regards to sustainability, notions of justice, and higher education.

## 2. Background and Literature Review

### *The Work College Model*

Work colleges offer students a unique learning opportunity by integrating work, learning, and service throughout a student’s college experience. Recognized by the government, federally approved work colleges are granted targeted federal aid to incentivize their innovative educational model. The following descriptions of work colleges help clarify the model as well as the federal policy that helps underwrite it within the context of the current phenomena of expensive education, student debt, and employability. It should be noted that the following descriptions are broadly characteristic of the work college model and do not describe every detail of a work college.

In 2015, seven institutions currently meet the requirements to receive the federal designation of *work college* [10]. The federally recognized work colleges include historic institutions such as Berea College, but also more contemporary institutions that have transitioned to becoming a work college such as Ecclesia College. The seven institutions are as follows: Alice Lloyd College in Kentucky, Berea College (also in Kentucky), Blackburn College in Illinois, College of the Ozarks in Missouri, Ecclesia College in Arkansas, Sterling College in Vermont, and Warren Wilson College in North Carolina [10].

Although these institutions maintain different religious affiliations, academic departments, demographics of students, and operating policies, each requires all of its students to work at an on-campus work station for every semester of their education [11]. This work helps the institutions defray the educational costs for students and offers students a unique apprentice-like work situation [12].

Students typically work 8 to 15 h per week in a variety of work stations that promote the institution's operations, support potential revenue-generating industries, and, generally, meet the staffing needs of the organization [10]. Student work stations may include the following roles, but vary depending on the needs of the institution: administrative assistants, farm work, accounts payable, information technology, graphic design, fundraising/development, carpentry, grounds-keeping, food service, hotel and restaurant management, welding, campus safety, and construction [12]. Through the students' work, the colleges are able to minimize operating costs by not hiring additional staff, promote employable characteristics (all the institutions have work grades and other work assessments), support revenue-generating industries, and promote student well-being by requiring consistent interaction between students and their work supervisors [11].

Often, at a work college, students have an instructor teaching them about some aspect of their academic major in a class session, and later that day, they apply their learning in a work context. For instance, a student may learn about soil types and management in class and later that day be expected, as an aspect of a work assignment, to spread appropriate levels of fertilizer to grow certain types of grasses to feed the cattle at the institution's farm. Mutuality between the student and institution develops through the work program as students actively sense an investment in the institution's future [13]. Although financial, academic, and vocational exchanges occur between a work college and its students, work colleges also have a vested interest in their students' work, given that in the 2015–2016 fiscal year the federal government appropriated \$8,390,000 for work colleges [10].

The innovation of the work college model reaches back in U.S. history to the pre-Civil War era when abolitionist activists promoted the *manual labor movement* to provide formal education for previously enslaved people who had escaped from plantations in the American south [11]. Goodman [13] described the engagement of this movement: "The manual labor movement nurtured a matrix of ideas and experiences that helped mere saints become abolitionists" (p. 48). This movement manifested itself in the first of several manual labor colleges in the northern half of the United States by providing a place where formerly enslaved persons could access the educational opportunities of their White peers. Although some discrepancies remain over which institution emerged first as a work college, Sorrell [11] documented that Oberlin College informed the application and imagination of many institutions that would follow it into the manual labor movement and develop into work colleges.

The federal government's value for work colleges emerged in a tangible way through government investment in the work college model in Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) [14]. An initial part of this section of the Higher Education Act of 1965 clearly portrays the Congressional goal—"to recognize, encourage, and promote the use of comprehensive work-learning-service programs as a valuable educational approach" in funding the work college model. In the 2015–2016 fiscal year, federal appropriations for this policy totaled \$8,390,000. These funds were distributed to the members of the Work College Consortium on a "per student" basis [10].

To access these federal funds, an institution must demonstrate four qualities: (a) integrate the work model as a holistic pedagogical expression of the institute, (b) require students to participate in the work program throughout their whole college experience, (c) identify goals and evaluation for the work program that is equal to the academic programs of the institution, and (d) promote professional development among student work supervisors that contributes to the work program [14]. Compliance with these federal criteria allows work colleges to access underutilized federal funds and positions the graduates of these institutions to be better prepared for the workplace [14]. The unique niche occupied by work colleges, though small, is one that precisely addresses the issue of sustainability in higher education. Can higher education be justice oriented and accessible to the public at large? Can higher education align the ballooning price with the value to individuals and society? These questions are at the core of a sustainability for a sector of the public square that both produces and diffuses knowledge. We view sustainability through the lens of an ecosystem. When one part of the knowledge producing system, the economy, or the community is underserved, the entire system suffers. In this way, sustainability and justice become intricately bound.

### 3. Methods

A policy-oriented case study was selected because its design is valuable for emerging organizational contexts, especially in the academic disciplines of sociology, industrial relations, and anthropology [15]. Stake stated that the case study methodology allows researchers to explore the complexity around a particular object or bounded system to provide “an analysis of the context and processes involved in the phenomenon under study” [16] (p. 329). A “holistic view of the process” [17] (p. 330) affords the case study methodology a distinctive trustworthiness. Gummesson described this aspect in depth, stating, “The detailed observations entailed in the case study method enable us to study many different aspects, examine them in relation to each other, view the process within its total environment, and also use the researchers’ capacity for ‘*verstehen*’ [empathy]” [17] (p. 76). This empathic engagement with a particular context allows researchers to engage, inhabit, explore, and analyze the multiplicity of contributing factors that influence a particular case—what Meyer [15] described as the deeply “contextual nature” (p. 330) of case study research.

Bardach [18] suggested that at its most fundamental level, policy analysis engages the social and political environment of federal policy and governmental investments. As Tatto suggested, “Achieving clear understandings of the history and social context of . . . policy is considered an essential part of the policy process” [19] (p. 5). Defining the local, national, and global resource context of the policy landscape of the case promotes a greater understanding of both the case and the government investment context that informed its transition to a work college.

#### 3.1. Site Selection

Fundamental to the site selection was the criterion that the institution had to be actively transitioning to a work college as defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965 (particularly Title IV). The institution selected is a minority-serving institution, located outside of a rapidly expanding city. During the course of this study, the institution made the transition to a work college model.

The case institution is a private college that has historically been associated with a Black religious denomination established to educate formerly enslaved persons in the southern United States following the American Civil War. At the time of the study, the institution enrolled around 230 students, although it has previously enrolled as many as 1000 students. Of the students enrolled, approximately 87% were African American, 11% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0.5% Native American. At the time of the study, the institution maintained around 50 staff and faculty, along with numerous adjuncts. The institution offers both Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Science degrees.

#### 3.2. Research Design

The study began in 2015 with a confirmation of the institution’s willingness to participate in the study, followed by Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at Azusa Pacific University. Overall, the data collection occurred during three site visits from the summer of 2015 to the spring of 2016. Participants were recruited through a variety of email correspondence leading to interview requests and an expansion of those participants through snowball sampling [20,21]. This method is used, as Yin [21] described, to identify new “offshoots” (p. 95) for possible interviews. This process yielded opportunities to interact with more individuals at the institution. Participants needed to be familiar with the institution during the transition to a work college, which took two years, and be prepared to talk about their role, influence, and perception.

Participants represented a diverse range of roles, ages, and races. The variety of roles included one board member, eight students, six faculty, ten staff, and seven administrators (as seen in Figure 1). In terms of racial makeup, there were 27 African Americans, four Latinos, and one White person (as seen in Figure 2). Along with these racial dynamics, participants provided an intergenerational perspective on the transition, with the youngest participant being 18 years old and the oldest in her 70s. The breadth of these diverse perspectives culminated in 32 interviews; in addition, access to

many other institutional archives and observational data greatly enhanced the collection of data [22] regarding the appeal of federal policy and government investment on the transition.

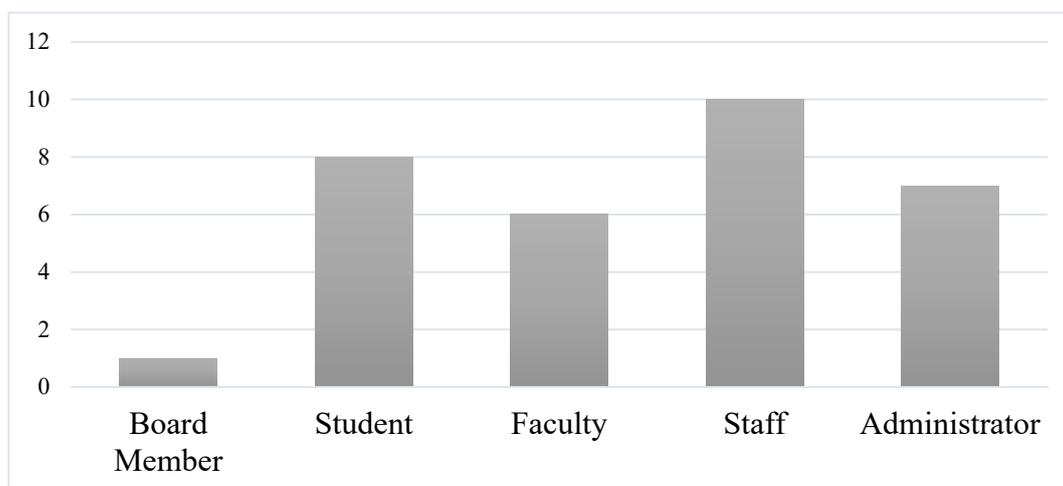


Figure 1. Roles of the Participants at the Case Institution.

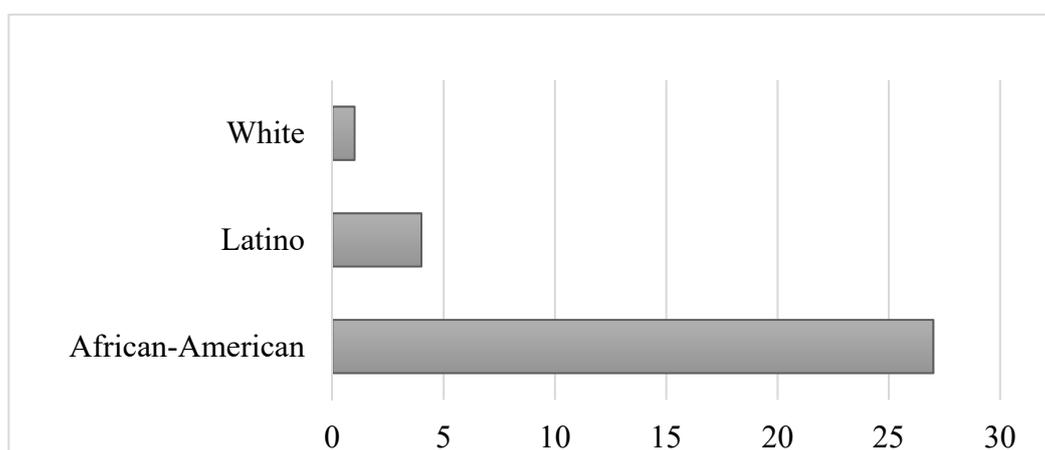


Figure 2. Race of the Participants at the Case Institution.

The questions that formed the Interview Protocol include intentionally broad, exploratory, and semi-structured questions (Appendix A). Probing questions were based on the responses of participants as they related to the research questions that followed these initial questions. The interviews lasted 60 to 90 min, were audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Each interview was labeled under an identifier that protected the anonymity of participants (e.g., Staff 1, Staff 2, Staff 3, Administrator 1, Faculty 1, etc.). These interviews occurred during three site visits in 2015 and 2016.

Immediately following the initial interviews, we used respondent verification, as outlined by Merriam and Tisdell [22], by contacting participants through email to member-check the interviews [23]. These transcriptions were then coded using both an open and axial coding method [21]. Each transcript was coded using the Dedoose software. After completing the coding of each transcript, emergent themes were derived through a triangulation process with other data sources (institutional archives, observations, and meeting minutes) by employing a similar level of rigor to the analysis as suggested with the open coding measures. In an effort to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, discrepant cases were also addressed, or those running counter to the dominant themes [22]. For this study, interview transcriptions, written institutional artifacts (i.e., the student handbook, faculty handbook, website, relevant emails, press releases, speeches held at the institution, the student newspaper, and institutional

brochures), and visual media artifacts (i.e., television mini-series about the institution and pictures of the campus) were triangulated.

#### 4. Findings

A mosaic of financial, social, ethical, vocational, and political factors affected the institution's transition to a work college. Based on an analysis of the data gathered from 32 individual interviews, document analysis, three site visits, and extensive analysis, two themes related to the viability and sustainability of the institution emerged:

1. Educational Justice Promotes Cultural Sovereignty
2. Academic Activism and Political Connections

The theme *Educational Justice Promotes Cultural Sovereignty* reflects the view of numerous participants that the college should exist to advocate, promote, and develop the broader community. Conversely, without an explicit public and community focus, the college risked both relevancy and survival. One staff member elaborated his perception that the institution's mission was to bring "cultural sovereignty" to its immediate community—hence the title of this theme is *in vivo*, that is, using the words of a participant as opposed to a descriptive label (Staff 7). This commitment to cultural sovereignty resulted in a deep academic and political activism that proved magnetic for national politicians at the time of the institution's transition.

The intersection of activism and political influence also shaped many participants' reflections and propelled them to work more fully toward embodying the mission of the institution and confirmed the second theme *Academic Activism and Political Connections*. During the transition, former President Clinton capitalized on the social and political capital tied to the work model by making an appearance at the institution for his wife's campaign. The political relationships and social connections that administrative leaders cultivated in the process of transitioning into a work college proved to be a valuable asset within the political arena.

These connections demonstrated evidence of the value that the transition to a work college produced for the institution. Fundamentally, the transition allowed institutional leaders to market their education as being primarily funded through state and federal grants. Throughout the transition, institutional leaders maximized these funding sources and curbed negative ramifications of recent employability policy (i.e., student loan defaults), as related to student defaults and employment, through the transition. The intersection of public perception, government funding, and employability for students provided the opportunity to examine the sustainability of the institution and also for the work college model as a value to students.

Although overlap exists among these two themes, the distinctions among them capture aspects of participants' experience that proved important to the work college transition. For a fuller engagement with each theme, the following sections illuminate, explore, and highlight aspects of experiences that participants reported having during the work college transition.

##### 4.1. Educational Justice Promotes Cultural Sovereignty

*For me, restoring sovereignty to people, cultural sovereignty through this sort of education, and economic sovereignty through the sorts of development we want to help promote and cultivate as an anchor institution in this neighborhood; that goes bone deep for me. We have to return that sense of dignity, control, and self-determination to people in their neighborhood. (Staff 7)*

This quote, made by an academic staff member at the institution, illustrates his sentiment of the mission and purpose of the institution with a persuasive vision of the future of the work college model: "to restore sovereignty to people" (Staff 7). The context of his reflection was the neighborhood immediately adjacent to the institution. However, aspects of his vision seemed to engage a broader sociological dream: restoring sovereignty to the African American community. This restoration of

a group of people, for this staff member as well as others at the institution, represented the deepest values of participants, as summarized in his explanation of sovereignty: “to return that sense of dignity, control, and self-determination to people” (Staff 7). From this staff member’s perspective, economic and cultural sovereignty effectively described the college’s missional call within the community—both the adjacent neighborhood and the broader African American community. From our perspective, restoration and reclamation is an important part of the notion of sustainability. The persistence of the neighborhood or community was intricately bound to the survival of the college, which made interdependence a key part of the formula to be sustainable.

Although no other participants described the institution’s missional engagement with the exact same frames and words, the idea surrounding the description of returning *dignity, control, and self-determination* to the community was reflected in sentiments expressed by other participants. The content of this interaction with the academic staff member transcended other conversations about finances, operations, policy, or politicians. One administrator perceived that the work college model allowed “this community to become a healthy and whole community” (Administrator 3). A movement away from excessive student debt for individual students contributed to this healthful and whole community that he described. However, his perspective suggested an empowered self-determination that remained important to the students that the institution served.

An upper-level student offered her perspective that institutional leaders had pursued a work college model to promote workforce development, employability, and careers for minority students at the institution. She said, “Our [African Americans’] unemployment rate is still about what, 14%? It’s way higher than the average American” (Student 3). Human capital, social capital, and workforce development language guided her reflection, but the additional frame of community capital motivated her perception that the work college model would allow the institution to continue as an historically minority-serving college that, in the words of an academic staff member “help people heal themselves and transform their communities” (Staff 7).

Another staff member explained that the work college model has the potential to cultivate dignity in students that comes as students pay for their education through their work (Staff 2). Institutional leaders hoped that the dignity cultivated through working to pay for college would flow into communal expressions of dignity. The institutional creed as represented in the Student Handbook emphasized this dynamic: “As a [member of the institution], I accept that greatness is the goal for myself, for my school and for my community—now and forever. Amen.” (Catalog A, Student Handbook A).

This focus on community and communal human relationships was driven by a “notion of justice” (Administrator 3). With education as the medium, economic development was a primary goal in the work college transition. As the same administrator reiterated to us, “You have to be able to show people or teach people how they can change their economic circumstances” to restore the community.

Another faculty member echoed the sentiment behind the notion of restoring sovereignty to racial groups like Hispanics and African Americans. He explained, “There is a link between poverty, low socioeconomic status, and race. Historically and today there is a huge link between that [poverty] and race” (Faculty 3). By diminishing the economic burden students bear while in higher education, he perceived the work college is “the way to help our students”—financially, socially, and career-wise. This assistance, he perceived, would simply but continually shape the racial communities of each of these students, promoting the self-dignity, communal sovereignty, and economic development that could propel whole communities.

The distinctive mission of the institution even led members of the city council to desire a formal role with the college. In fact, many participants noted the interest of municipal, political, and corporate entities in the institution’s unique mission, vision, and application of higher education, especially considering the types of students they educated. It was almost as if others magnetically moved toward the college, especially in any discussion of the work model, to better understand their educational model. This fascination cultivated social and political capital self-perpetuated and replicated in a variety of dimensions.

A board member explained the way this social and political capital manifested itself: “Anytime that you are able to put students into a work place, and people observe those students and their work habits, then it’s going to get publicity” (Board Member 1). This publicity broadened the social influence of the institution as well as its graduates, as a recent alumnus and new staff member discussed (Staff 5). He explained how students live into the leadership creed statements of the college, such as, “Leave places better than you found them. Love something greater than yourself. Live a life that matters, and lead from wherever you are. [This mindset] keeps instilling in them what the school is all about” (Staff 5). Students are then enabled to become embodied representatives of the institution (Staff 12).

This embodiment, to be faithful to the institutional mission, must reflect the “composition” of the local neighborhood and, more broadly, the city where the institution is located (Staff 7). This staff member continued, “There’s some sort of sociological ideas about the idea that White space is always going to be White space, but [the institution] is always going to be Black space” (Staff 3). This formative aspect of *Black space*, by the academic staff members’ estimation, could never be divorced from the college. Thus, as the institution cultivated engaged student leaders who demonstrated the changes that occurred in students’ individual, social, political, and cultural capital, they developed the college: causing this capital to flourish and express itself to the surrounding metropolitan area. The explicit political and sociological construction of the institution as a Minority Serving Institution (MSI), particularly a *Black space*, led many aspects of the work college transition to be interpreted in terms of a minority context and the participants to reflect on the symbolic nature of the events that surrounded the work college transition (Staff 5).

One student described what he perceived to be an excellent example of this reality: “The We Over Me Farm” (Student 5). In a state where football is king, institutional leaders chose to make their football field into a multiple-acre organic farm. The student said:

Work college students, they work down there [referring to the farm]. It produces produce for various communities. They give back some to charities, but they also sell the food to different local restaurants around [the metropolitan area]. In that aspect, I would say that this part of the work college does single-handedly help the community around [the metropolitan area] because they give out the produce as charity, and to different businesses, restaurants. (Student 3)

Stories like these reached into popular culture and generated interest in the institution as an MSI that has utilized work to help its students graduate with less debt and serve the local community. By selling to local businesses and giving away local produce, institutional leaders have found creative ways to serve the community, given that the institution “remains in the middle of a food desert” (Staff 4). National media—HBO, Facebook, ESPN, a National Football League team—captured the story of the “We Over Me Farm” and paired the farm with the missional aspects of using a football field where minority students grow food to pay for their education and give fresh produce to local charities, resonated with potential friends and donors. The breadth of this reach for many participants was punctuated in former President Clinton’s visit to campus in February 2016 when he observed that the institution “works the way we believe America should work”. This comment catalyzed a brand of social and political capital for institutional leaders that, like the farm, “provided a proof of concept” for the work college transition (Staff 7). The farm is a good example of environmental sustainability reflected within a larger framework of community sustainability for social justice.

A distinct aspect of the transition related to cultivating human, social, and cultural capital for individual students. The concept of human capital is concerned with the personal and workforce skills that participants perceived students might gain in attending the institution. Social capital describes the newly generated social networks students developed through their engagement at the college. Finally, cultural capital related to negotiating the expectations of professional positions (e.g., knowing how to dress, when to be at work, how to interact with business professionals, etc.). Although these exact theoretical frameworks were not used by participants, they describe various aspects of the work model participants perceived benefitted students who attended the institution.

An administrator's reflection conveyed an effort to see students change and grow: "We're going to do things that make our students stronger and more competitive" (Administrator 3). A staff member's view complemented this opinion by asking me this rhetorical question: "If we can use every opportunity while you are on our campus as a teachable moment to help you become a better citizen in the world, then why not do it?" (Staff 4). Her question reflected the deep desire of many employees of the institution to develop students in every way possible.

According to participants in the study, the work college as a model became the primary prism for change in the students' lives. "Ownership in work" (Administrator 2) and "personal finance, learning to manage their money" developed as two important aspects of this orientation toward work in the work college model for many students (Staff 5). These emphases on human, social, and cultural capital prompted a faculty member as he reflected on the work college transition to opine, "It's really upgraded" (Faculty 3) the students by allowing them to develop what another staff member described as a "suite of skills, abilities, and experiences" (Staff 3). According to the interview data, this convergence equipped students to be successful citizens who could broadly contribute to community life.

In summary, participants perceived that the work college model provided an avenue for *educational justice* and the *restoration of sovereignty*, both for individual students and the communities they represent. Participants reflected that through cultivating human, social, and cultural capital among students, leveraging the work program as a beacon of economic development, and focusing on community development, the institution could muster significant change with the capacity to empower racially disenfranchised communities. This theme, in many ways, proved to be the heartbeat and animus of the work college transition. It also naturally bridges to the next theme, *Academic Activism and Political Connections*, which highlights the voice and influence the college developed through the transition.

#### 4.2. Academic Activism and Political Connections

*"We wanted to come here, because this college works the way we think America should work. Everybody gets a chance, everybody can learn . . . this college is a metaphor of what this election is all about." (former President Bill Clinton, 2016)*

*"This is in no way shape or form a criticism of anyone. One of the things about being in higher ed. is that folks are active academicians. . . . I'm not trying to be anybody else's version of an [administrator], but I am an academic activist . . . Why don't we stop preaching to our comfortable choirs and get out and talk to the unconverted?" (Administrator 3)*

These two quotes highlight the essence of this theme: the role of activism and political connectedness in the work college transition. Although both quotes will be examined in fuller detail in the next section, a brief anecdote from an administrator illuminated these reflections for us in a profound way. He stated simply, "It's going to be very political" (Administrator 3). He was referring to the intersection of the student population (i.e., low socioeconomic, minority, first generation college students), employability, and the work college model, especially with all of these dynamics occurring in an election year. With a former president noting the human capital tied to the work model, especially as it is expressed at the institution, his words may prove prophetic. Similar to the preceding sections, we found expressions of activism to be a formidable part of the sustainable social ecosystem exhibited in this case study. In the following paragraphs, we survey two sub-themes that emerged: *Academic Activism* and *Political Connections*.

The institution's transition to a work college model prompted many participants to reflect on their role as political activists while at the institution. The previous quote from Administrator 3 reflected how one administrator aligned his sense of vocation with his work at the institution. In his own words, Administrator 3 described his role as a leader at the institution to be that of an "academic activist". He explained his passion to apply transformative educational models: "Why don't we stop preaching to our comfortable choirs and get out and talk to the unconverted". The administrator's evangelistic

passion to convince outsiders about the possibility of using higher education as an avenue for change proved persuasive in the moment. For him, the issue of preparedness, employability, and affordability were especially resonant, and he was convinced that the transition to a work college would address these issues.

Another staff member described a brief conversation he had with a student that informed his vision for how the institution could be a vehicle for academic activism. If the institution successfully transitioned into a work college, he believed then that the broader vision of the senior leader would come to fruition (Staff 7). He described the student as wanting to “show people it’s possible to do economic development, community development [through the work college] without doing gentrification by putting control in the hands of the people in the community that we’re actually a part of” (Staff 7). Of critical importance to this staff member was the restoration of ownership and sovereignty to the local community.

This anecdote and hopeful vision about the future of the institution resonated deeply with the staff member, prompting him to declare his vision for academic activism within his own life. That vision was expressed through the work college:

For me [ . . . ] economic sovereignty through the sorts of development we want to help promote and cultivate as an anchor institution in this neighborhood goes bone deep for me. We have to return that sense of dignity, control, and self-determination to people in their neighborhood. (Staff 7)

Both participants described the unique role that the institution played in advocating for economic and business development of the community. This position of protection and advocacy was evident in several of our conversations.

Two common stories—a protest against the dump and the lack of easy access to a grocery store for the community surrounding the institution—linked to the recent history of the work college transition significantly shaped participants’ view toward the institution’s role as a political advocate for sustainability within the community.

Participants perceived both events to be municipal decisions that affected the adjacent neighborhood. The first issue related to residents’ inability to access a grocery store. The second issue referenced a proposal to place a city-wide dump a few miles from the institution. A staff member expressed her concern about these issues:

There’s no grocery store in this area, there’s no food, so you’re gonna bring all of your trash from all over the city down here and dump on us, but you’re not willing to give us a Kroger’s or an Albertson’s or a Tom Thumb or whatever so that the citizens can survive in this area. (Staff 4)

Her comments about these issues were steeped with passion and advocacy for the community, although she personally had access to these amenities because she lived 45 min from campus. Many staff, faculty, students, and administrators described the same concerns; significantly, all of them positioned themselves in an advocacy role on behalf of the community. Another staff member recounted this activism:

A grand experience that I gained from [the proposal] was just learning about food deserts in general and about the seventh sector of [city center] and how we are federally recognized as a food desert . . . and so that’s how I began to get a little bit more involved in the way that the city was handling that issue. What we did was . . . research, and we found that the city was attempting to implement a larger landfill. We have a landfill that’s about 1.6 miles away from the school, it’s right down the street, but we don’t have grocery stores, we don’t have a pharmacy. There were talks of the library closing, but they built a new library instead, so that was great. Just some basic necessities that the community did not have, they weren’t there, but the city was willing to expand the landfill that’s a mile away to be the largest landfill within the southwestern region of the United States. (Staff 5)

The outlook of each member was notable, as it suggested a deep commitment to utilizing the work model, particularly the institution's garden, to advocate for the entire community.

These concerns, however, illustrated to participants the same fundamental need to take a stand. Consider the description by a student affairs professional (Staff 5):

This stand mobilized the institution—students, faculty, staff, and administrators alike—to utilize the political and social structures available to them and demand equity from the city planning organization. (Staff 5)

These examples also illustrated how the institution, especially as a work college, could mobilize people toward political activism and advocacy. To use this advocacy well, the institutional leaders also needed political advocates who would embrace their activist vision of higher education. In the next section, we describe some significant political advocates the institution garnered as it transitioned into a work college.

Political relationships and attention have proven to benefit the work college transition for the case institution, as reflected in the comments of an administrator about a statement he perceived former President Clinton to make when he visited campus: "You know why we came to [the institution] college? [The institution] works the way we think America should" (Administrator 3). The administrator perceived this comment to reference the institution's transition to a work college, and he viewed the interaction as a prescient conversation regarding how the mission and future of the college would be amplified within political spheres.

In a candid moment, the same administrator related the potential resonance of the work college model across political party lines: "If those guys [the Republicans] loved it, I can get our guys [the Democrats] to love it" (Administrator 3). He expressed a hope that the work college model might become a tool that gained public attention;

Here's the other thing I think is going to happen. It's going to become very political, this model. Not saying it already isn't, but if you're looking around the country and you're an elected official, you're just senator or you're a representative and you're trying to figure this thing out; you are going to have to come look at this. (Administrator 3)

Similar to the conviction of this administrator that the work college model would have political magnetism within the United States, other participants echoed his sentiments.

In summary, participants at the institution perceived a direct relationship between the work college transition and their activism and new political relationships. The activism expressed itself through the vehicle of the work college model. Through the work college model, institutional leaders intended to bring economic development to the community, including through the means of advocacy—particularly addressing municipal rule-making and plans related to city dumps and easy access to grocery stores. The interview participants were convinced that significant political leaders would be attracted to the work college model, as former President Clinton's visit during February 2016 attested. The political and activist themes can be aligned with the next theme: how the work college leveraged significant state and federal aid to remain viable.

## 5. Discussion

Organizations leverage resources to promote and realize their missions. Often, these missions, especially within higher education, suggest some outcome of human betterment or flourishing—an ethical vision.

In the case of the institution that was the focus of this case study, an ethical vision propelled the transition into a work college and also expanded its influence within the community and broader culture. Simply stated, this vision was to restore "sovereignty to people" (Staff 7). Embedded in this comment emerged a desire among participants "to return that sense of dignity, control, and self-determination to people", to restore "economic sovereignty through the sorts of development

we want to help promote and cultivate as an anchor institution in this neighborhood”, and to return “cultural sovereignty through this sort of education” (Staff 7). This vision shaped the DNA of the work college transition.

The rich mission that many participants communicated—to promote cultural, economic, and educational sovereignty—cannot exist without access to diverse funding streams and other financial resources. The following sections address the research questions that guided this study by discussing participants’ ethical vision of the institution had on the work college transition.

### 5.1. *The Intersection of Cultural Sovereignty and Policy*

The research question addressed the socio-political climate of the institution’s transition: How do notions of justice to individuals and community influence one institution’s transition to a work college?

The context of the institution and the factors that led to its transition crystallized as participants described their perceptions. Leading to the transition, the institution had struggled to remain viable and sustain its existence. Debt had handicapped its student population and led to default rates among its graduates that approached the 30% cap allowed by the federal government for future access to federal student financial aid. Enrollment fell, regional accreditation was threatened, and the president was replaced annually; these problems led many participants to believe institutional closure was in sight.

In the midst of these challenges, administrative leaders embraced change that allowed them to enhance the educational outcomes of their students. One administrator recounted that he felt commissioned by the Board of Trustees to make “radical change” (Administrator 3). With this commission echoing in his mind, he said, “There’s been a mandate [ . . . ] to change, to do something different” (Administrator 3). This desire to *try something different* was evident in the mindset of almost all participants and was reflected throughout the data. This commitment to radical change propelled the work college transition and manifested itself in a justice-oriented expression of education that also provided a pathway to financial sustainability.

### 5.2. *The Work College Model as an Expression of Educational Justice and Sustainability.*

A unique educational model—*restoration of sovereignty through educational justice*—emerged from a variety of societal and institutional factors, catalyzing and propelling the transition. This vision for using the work college model to enhance cultural sovereignty among the students and within the community was the *animus* that propelled all the other factors.

The following sections outline an argument for this distinct ethical motivation that was evident throughout the data; notably, this discussion parallels the history and origins of the work colleges themselves. Although language like *restoration*, *sovereignty*, *sustainability*, and *educational justice* was not used by the pioneers of the work college movement, the application remains the same. Early documents related to the manual labor and work college movements described a similar matrix of ideas [11]. As Goodman [13] explained, the manual labor college allowed African Americans to enjoy full educational benefits and the opportunities of their White peers during the years prior to and following the Civil War.

Undergirding the work colleges’ development was the conviction of work college leaders that “God has made of one blood all people of the earth” [23] (p. vi). This commitment to equity and access consistently emerged in the history of Berea College, one of the earliest work colleges. The goal of Berea, “to promote the cause of Christ” [24] (p. 16), reflected the educational commitment of the original leaders to defray the expense of education through manual labor and to include all races, particularly the escaped African American slaves [11]. This commitment emerged in rural Kentucky prior to the Civil War—before a common cultural affirmation of racial, gender, and economic equity existed in America [25]. This application of educational justice and cultural sovereignty through broad access for all people also manifested itself in the institution’s commitment toward personal sovereignty through work.

The founders of Berea College believed their students needed to develop as whole people. Thus, they promoted the “values of independence, industry, and innovation” [24] (p. 17). These qualities parallel the commitments of leaders at the case study institution to provide *dignity, control, and self-determination*—for their students a statement of educational justice applied through personal and societal means.

In reviewing the data from the case institution, language specifically referencing *educational justice* emerged in an interview with one participant. He explained that the institution, with the added dimension of the work college components, was a vehicle for societal change:

For me, restoring sovereignty to people, cultural sovereignty through this sort of education, and economic sovereignty through the sorts of development we want to help promote and cultivate as an anchor institution in this neighborhood goes bone deep. We have to return that sense of dignity, control, and self-determination to people in their neighborhood. (Staff 7)

This summary quote captured many of the elements that emerged among participants and echoed throughout their interviews.

The *neighborhood* referenced the African American community in which the case study institution was located. *Sovereignty* described the ability of individuals and their communities to self-author and govern their lives, rather than to be subject to outside forces, whether economic, political, educational, or psychological.

*Cultural sovereignty* illustrated the validation of the African American community’s social practices, relationships, rites of passage, language, voice, music, etc. *Economic sovereignty* described the broadening of social and workforce networks, training, and opportunities. *Restoration of sovereignty to a people* culminated in the continuation of self and communal authorship in the economic, cultural, educational, and political arenas of life, but also in affective change—*dignity, control, and self-determination*—that describes those students, neighbors, and community members who interact with the college. In his book, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*, Quashie [26] explored Black identity and interior. The notion of double consciousness by Du Bois is examined as a method for navigating and even surviving the impact of racism both institutionally and individually. Quashie wrote:

But what is striking is that his notion of double consciousness does not characterize the inner life of the black subject, at least not an interior that has its own sovereignty—that is, Du Bois does not offer a description of the black subject as having access to his selfhood beyond the public discourse of race, access that is unfettered and unrestricted, even if only in his own mind. [26] (p. 14)

Sovereignty in Quashie’s terms included the interior, which is not subject to the same controls of society when compared to the exterior. Sovereignty then is an issue of control and purpose and is a deeply meaningful expression of the trajectory of the institution in relationship to Black identity, community, education, and employment.

*Educational justice* emerged as the tool participants perceived could bring this restoration of sovereignty and motivated much of the activism that was both implicit and explicit in the work college model. An administrator confessed, “I am driven by this notion of justice. I think that people should have access to great lives” (Administrator 3). An educational intervention through the work college transition seemed to challenge the economic disparity evident in both the immediate neighborhood and the broader African American community. The same administrator reflected about the institution as a vehicle for justice, “You have to be able to show people or teach people how they can change their economic circumstances” (Administrator 3). Economic development, as expressed through the work college model, challenged the fundamental structures that suppressed the population of students the institution served. Language around agency, access, and accountability was evident, as those interviewed expressed a desire for genuine transformation in their students and community that might contribute to economic development.

As a researcher on the institution's staff stated, "Education is never going to be a silver bullet" (Staff 7); however, education was one part of a response motivated by a genuine desire to restore individual and communal sovereignty through an ethic of justice and equity [27]. In this brief examination, institutional leaders expressed a missional commitment for the institution past its own survival that manifested itself through the work college model as a means of social justice. Implicit within their perspective was a similar commitment to communal activism that would mediate power differentials while also modeling self-authorship in the neighboring communities and among the student body.

A passion for communal activism was evident in the reflections of participants as they discussed the transition. This activism emanated from their belief that restoring social, economic, and cultural sovereignty was the primary project of their institution. As described in the previous section, a restoration of cultural sovereignty requires a distinct recognition of power and self-authorship in one's circumstances.

Some common stories emerged around the institution's involvement in activism, paralleling the mission and vision of the institution's transition to a work college. In these stories, the institution's role to promote activism and constructive interaction between government officials and the surrounding under-resourced communities illustrated the fundamental transformation participants perceived in the work college transition: to restore self-authorship, dignity, and power through cultural sovereignty to broader oppressed communities. This activist orientation originated in the mission of the college. As a freedman's college established following the Civil War to educate recently liberated African American slaves, the institution's commitment to social justice parallels that of the manual labor and work college movements.

An example of this dynamic emerged in a conversation with an academic staff member in which he described the historic development of the institution: "I think the vision is to keep the under-resourced communities and their transformation at the core of who we are and who we serve" (Staff 7). This contemporary reflection and willingness to influence broader segments of society parallels the initial application of the manual labor movement [11]. The movement shaped many people, as Goodman described, into social activists by nurturing "ideas and experiences that helped mere saints become abolitionists" [13] (p. 48).

This ethos of justice for the community provided a practical lens for many participants, inspiring them to realize the benefits of the transition for their individual students as well as the broader African American community. One administrator described his role as being an "academic activist" because of his willingness to leverage the work college model as a vehicle for societal change, empowerment, and reduced poverty (Administrator 3). Pairing the role of *academic activist* with the model of the work college emerged across the data in a way that suggested a similar *abolitionist* mission: to free those enslaved from tyranny and oppression [27]. This mindset informed the mindset of the members of the institution, positioning them as protectors of the local neighborhood as well as their broader social community. It is interesting that the most visceral responses among participants concerned these two issues.

The accounts of several participants reflected their epic-like struggle against economic injustice and their activism for the neighboring communities. For example, participants fought against a proposed nearby landfill and advocated for access to nearby grocery stores. Eventually, the institutional members took practical activist steps by establishing an organic fruit and vegetable garden on their football field, created a grocery store, and distributed fresh vegetables and fruit to the local community through a mobile food pantry. A pursuit for educational justice through a sustainable and holistic model, the work college model, provided a robust foundation for institutional leaders to continue to develop *sovereignty* for the community they served.

Activism, in turn, mediated a position between the institution and the local communities whereby both the members of the community and the participants could develop a sense of sovereignty: personal dignity, influence over circumstances, and self-authorship. After multiple injunctions, the city

relinquished its plans to locate a landfill in that community by responding to the indictment by leaders at the institution whose motto was, “We are not trash!” (Student 1).

### 5.3. Significance

This study contributes to the literature in several distinct ways. Foremost, the study findings explore a sustainable model of higher education, the work college, which remains under-studied and under-utilized within higher education. At the time this paper was drafted, only one dissertation [11] had addressed aspects of this model. Several noted scholars described the work college model and the model’s impact in their publications [12,28] but primarily concluded with a challenge for other researchers to study the effects of the work model through other empirical studies. Although the work college model is not broadly known and understood, the role of land-grant colleges and universities are studied a great deal [27,29,30]. Land-grant colleges exist with a distinct commitment to their surrounding communities, and the sustainability of the college and the community is rooted in a sense of interdependence [30]. The comparison that we find useful in terms of significance is the notion that the greater an institutions commitment to the surrounding community, the more relevant, justice-oriented and sustainable it appears to become. On the contrary, distance from the community or even exclusion of community practices and insights creates an array of other problems [31,32]. This comparison leads to further commentary and discussion on mission, later in this section.

This study chronicled in a more fulsome way the history and practice of a work college with a special focus on its sustainability and diversified funding strategies. Elements of the financial funding model, particularly those that relate to federal and state grants, employability policy, and government investment, could prove especially helpful for both higher education researchers and practitioners who are considering new and sustainable models of higher education. The work college model provides a potential mechanism for a more sustainable form of higher education that promotes employability, reduces student debt, and curbs higher education costs, especially for low SES populations and minority communities.

In addition, this study contributes to the deep and expansive vision of justice which many in higher education promote and pursue by illustrating that justice and sustainability can provide a dynamic engine in higher education. Educational justice and sustainability promote cultural sovereignty and should not be diminished within higher education, whether in practice or research. Historically, just educational reform catalyzed the same saints who initiated the manual labor movement and became abolitionists [11]. This animus contributed to the motivation of the study’s participants, the same motivation as their abolitionist predecessors: to allow African Americans, Hispanics, and other minorities to enjoy the full educational opportunities of their White peers.

The disparity that existed in the pre-civil war era remains a living reality for many in the United States. This reality resonated with many at the institution, although they rarely portrayed the inequity in negative ways. They focused on their mission and goal through the work college transition, describing the transition of this model as a means to promote economic development, divinity, self-authorship, and sovereignty for their students and community [33]. This mission guided participants even more than the mission of finding their graduates gainful employment, encouraging social networks for their students, limiting student debt, or maintaining accreditation, although each of these aspects contributed to a fuller expression of cultural sovereignty for their community [26,33]. This missional focus proved persuasive to me and begets the broader question: How can higher education institutions encourage the communal good? And, for institutions that do not, how will they manifest threats to the sustainability of higher education’s purpose and function in society?

A third contribution of this study builds from preceding discussion on educational justice and mission. Rhoades and Slaughter’s framework of Academic Capitalism manifested itself at the college through institutional leaders leveraging the “internal, cultural, economic, and political forces and actors” [7] (p. 104) toward the institution’s sustainability. With the college’s student funding strategy organized around accessing state and federal money, institutional leaders clearly positioned the

institution to be “entrepreneurial” [34] within the higher education marketplace. However, this aggressive pursuit of financial growth cannot exist independently of a persuasive and transformative vision of education. Wiederspan [33] illustrated the interplay of mission and money as factors. Although they seem opposed to each other, they are actually interdependent. Mission-driven programs and money-driven initiatives remain irreducibly complex [35,36]. As an example, mission and money exist as two distinct wings on the same airplane. Without both wings, planes cannot gain lift and fly [37].

Thus, pitting money and mission against each other only distracts from the real issue, which is how money and mission can collaborate to establish a fuller vision of higher education. Members of the institution embraced this collaborative vision by first identifying their desire to bring educational justice through the institution and then finding a financially viable and transformative model to use to bring this justice. Sustainable higher education that transforms and brings justice to those from low socioeconomic backgrounds is possible, and the case institution illustrates this reality.

Finally, this study suggests that deep and expansive visions of justice that often accompany higher education institutional mission can be sustainable, diverse, and offer a compelling interest for many constituencies [38]. Justice in higher education is sustainable as higher education institutions adopt practices and curricula that enhance the workforce development and preparedness of their studies.

## 6. Conclusions

This policy-oriented case study examined how notions of justice influenced the transition of an institution to a work college in the midst of the recent unsustainable phenomena of expensive education, employability, and student debt generated within American higher education [37,38]. This unsustainable environment produced a germane context for the case institution to transition to a work college, which limits much of the pressure that each phenomenon—expensive education, employability, and student debt—levies on both institutions and students by providing work opportunities for students that promote post-graduate employability and limit the overall cost of education. At an institutional level, the work college model proved persuasive even for a seasoned politician. While speaking about the institution, former President Clinton remarked, “This college works the way America should work”. His message spoke clearly to participants of this study as a proof of concept for their work college model and validated their pursuit for justice in higher education. The notions of justice that guided the transition sustained the institution and allowed it to diversify its financial footprint within the community, admit students who allowed the institution to access the maximum amount of federal and state funds, and cultivate significant political endorsements and relationships.

### 6.1. Limitations

The contributions of this research may prove especially helpful to institutional leaders interested in transitioning an institution into a work college. However, one constraint of qualitative research, especially a single-case case study methodology, remains that research is conducted in a highly-contextualized environment with a limited number of participants that may not apply to most situations, populations, or other contexts. Thus, the findings should be interpreted through the highly-contextualized situation of the case institution.

The brief duration of this study also proved to be a significant limitation of the study. Initial interviews began in November 2015 and concluded in March 2016. Although some unique aspects of the transition occurred during this period, the time period from beginning to end remained relatively brief. During my site visit, the institution seemed to be at a relatively hopeful stage in the process: enrollment numbers and financial gifts were increasing, and administrators, faculty, staff, and students were optimistic. If the study maintained more longevity, then the challenges of the process may have emerged as the institution continued in the transition.

## 6.2. Future Research and Practice

This research study identified several aspects of the current policy context that created a germane environment for the institution to transition to a work college. Along with these environmental factors, this study described particular institutional factors that contributed to the institution's transition. Many of these contextually-rich factors—both socio-political as well as institutional—deserve further research and application within higher educational settings. This section outlines opportunities and implications for future research and practice.

The uniqueness of the work college model within higher education immediately emerged as a potential area for future research; however, other significant elements of this study deserve equal attention by scholars. Similarly, in the current political context, a consideration of financially stable models of higher education, whether the work college or another model, necessitate further reflection. These sustainable models and their framework for financial stability could significantly contribute to higher education literature, as described in the literature review.

As has been addressed throughout this paper, the work college model remains an under-utilized expression of higher education. Consequently, it is also under-researched. Much remains to be researched and empirically examined concerning the work model.

As a formal movement, researchers have exclusively addressed the model within the American landscape of higher education, focusing particularly on the seven federally recognized work colleges. However, because of its common-sense method, the phenomenon of uniting work, study, and life reaches as far back as the monastic communities within the major religions of the world.

Consequently, a work college model has emerged in other contexts, especially in the developing world. One notable institution has emerged in South Africa: the Tertiary School in Business Administration (TSiBA). The national government in South Africa has attempted to incentivize employability development through this institution by allowing businesses to receive a tax break by providing apprenticeship opportunities for students. This institution suggests a diverse footprint of work college and work education institutions throughout the globe.

Along with a more global perspective on the development and operations of work institutions, significant research is needed to address the specific outcomes of a work college. Currently, many of these outcomes remain anecdotal, with Wolniak and Pascarella [12] providing the most robust empirical research on the work college students, employability, and academic outcomes. The outcomes that on-campus work has for students enrolled at work colleges and its transferability to gainful employment would be particularly noteworthy. Any study of these specific outcomes would contribute significantly to the literature and form a body of work surrounding the work college model and would help evaluate the model's contribution through a more empirical lens. The streams of research that the work college model generates currently seem limitless, considering so little has been empirically reviewed. As future studies on the work college model emerge, more precision can be given to these research interests.

Another implication for future research emerges at the theoretical level with institutional transition and revenue diversification strategies. When mission and money exist in a symbiotic relationship, they usually allow an institution to move forward [7]. Discussions of finances, funding, and revenue-streams are often bastardized within higher education for a higher order of conversations that may revolve around access, justice, equity, diversity, and quality. However, within many of the current models of American higher education, revenue remains a necessity.

Practically applying and studying revenue-diversification strategies, broadening fundraising footprints, and defraying cost within higher education institutions through empirical research may illuminate the balance necessary between mission and money. Similar to an analysis of how constituent groups utilize a theory, the combined influence of justice and sustainability in their decision-making processes could prove useful in better understanding higher education culture and practice.

A final area of future research involves systematic and empirical reflection on methods for promoting sustainable higher education models [37], especially for low SES groups. The institution's

financial model, although not yet fully mature, primarily used state and federal money to fund each student's education. This funding, paired with the institution's partnerships with local business and corporations, proved magnetic for all involved. Their contribution, combined with the state and federal aid, could exceed the cost of educating each individual student, thus making the model sustainable. This figure does not include the parallel donors' funds, foundation grants, and other institutional grants that the case institution could access.

Certainly, there is a need for continued empirical research on how federal policy and government investment in higher education might be able to contribute toward sustainable educational models. However, the examination of this case institution provides a basis for further examination of the following question: Are other institutions educating minorities and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds with sustainable financial methods? If yes, then how are they financing this type of education? The socio-political environment—reduced affordability, concerns about employability, and student debt—remains policy-ripe for certain institutions that can defray educational costs, promote gainful employment, and remain financially solvent. The work college model certainly could be added to this list, although institutions that leverage diversified funding-streams and sustainable financial models should also be included. The work college model also prompts imaginative explorations of its possibilities, especially in higher education practice.

### 6.3. Final Thoughts

The case institution's transition to a work college illustrates that higher education institutions can dually pursue justice and sustainable practices. In a sense, these two factors contribute to the sustained influence of higher education in society: Justice is sustainable and notions of justice should guide sustainable practices in higher education. Pursuing notions of justice such as economic development, community development, access, affordability, cultural sovereignty, and workforce development in higher education settings can restore sovereignty to whole communities of people and manages many of the sustainability challenges that higher education institutions will face in the upcoming century.

As one participant described, higher education leaders need to move from simply being active academics to become "academic activists" (Administrator 3), by leveraging their institutions for the betterment of society. Finding robust revenue streams to cultivate these pathways remains an enduring challenge in higher education [7]. However, we think the work college model provides a winsome, translatable, and practical model for pursuing justice through education.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

The questions that form the Interview Protocol describe the type of *intentionally broad, exploratory, and semi-structured* questions that will be used during the interview process. These types of questions will be followed by probes based on the responses of participants as their responses relate to the research question.

Tell me a little about your institution's transition to a work college . . .

- Why do you believe the leaders of your institution chose to move toward a work college model? How did they make that decision?

- Do you perceive any gain/loss in this transition?
- What effect do you sense transitioning to a work college will have on students and graduates?
- What influence do you perceive this transition will have on your funding model?
- What do you perceive to be the influence of joining the Work College Consortium (WCC)? How will this consortium influence your institution?
- What influence do you believe this transition will have on your relationship with civic and governmental organizations?
- What do you perceive are the unique realities of becoming a work college? How do they affect the experience of being at your institution?

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