

Case studies

Exploring Inter-institutional Collaboration: The Case of a Franchise Accelerator Program

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Keywords: Inter-institutional collaboration, inter-organizational collaboration, franchising education, franchise accelerators, higher education institutions

<https://doi.org/10.53703/001c.73291>

Small Business Institute Journal

Vol. 19, Issue 1, 2023

Collaboration between franchisors and higher education institutions (HEIs) has emerged as a pathway for franchise benefactors to facilitate the inclusion of franchising curricula into business programs. This qualitative evaluative case study focuses on a franchise accelerator program that was designed to create opportunities for women and under-represented populations to pursue business ownership. The findings illustrate the value this inter-institutional collaboration creates for various stakeholders and identifies the critical components that contributed or detracted from this program. Further, it articulates recommendations for improving the program and hurdles that must be overcome. This case study may encourage more HEIs and franchisors to partner to attract more diverse talent into franchising.

Business format franchising involves two parties, the ‘franchisor’ and the ‘franchisee.’ The franchisor grants another party the right to use the franchisor’s trade name and operating system to market goods and/or services, whereas the ‘franchisee’ is the other party who pays the franchisor for this right of usage (Judd & Justis, 2008). This symbiotic relationship (Watson et al., 2005) has been described in multiple ways. For example, some scholars argue this is an entrepreneurial partnership (Kaufmann & Dant, 1999), others describe the relationship as a team (Clarkin & Rosa, 2005), and some suggest the two parties are simply contractually bound (Doherty & Quinn, 1999).

With an expansive footprint in the U.S. and globally, franchising is a highly accessible avenue for employment and represents an important aspect of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In the U.S., the output of franchised establishments in 2021 exceeded \$826.6 billion, representing 3% of the Gross Domestic Product (International Franchising Association, 2022). The number of franchised establishments also grew to 774,965 in 2021, an increase of 2.8% over the prior year. As a highly regulated sector in the U.S., becoming a franchisee enables individuals to realize their vision of business ownership without having to generate the idea for the venture or develop the business model (Kourmoulaki & Siameti, 2010). Franchising reduces capital and other risks associated with entering self-employment; therefore, it has been promoted as a method for women and minori-

ties to engage in business ownership (Dant et al., 1996; Weaven et al., 2019).

Despite the size of the industry and affording individuals the opportunity to become business owners, limited research has been conducted to understand franchising education within higher education institutions (HEIs). Cumberland et al. (2019) found that while franchising represents a popular entry path for small business ownership, a limited number of HEIs recognize this differentiated business model with dedicated courses in their business schools. Over the last decade, however, more scholars have begun to call for universities to develop and teach franchising curricula (Abbey, 2010; Chee & Bhatti, 2013; Quach et al., 2020; Rast et al., 2020). Quach et al. (2020) point to the atypical nature of franchising. They recommend that educational programs be designed from the outside-in (i.e., context-specific) to teach students how to assess franchise opportunities realistically. Abbey (2010) argues that HEIs have an obligation to raise the level of awareness of the franchise business model among students as a path toward self-employment. Rast et al. (2020) have called for HEIs to offer a franchising-specific curriculum to achieve Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) student development goals, boost students’ self-confidence and self-efficacy, and ensure more inclusiveness within communities that are under-represented in entrepreneurial activity.

^a Acknowledgment: The author would like to thank the stakeholders who were part of the Franchise Accelerator Program for their willingness to share their insights about this type of experiential-based learning initiative.

Dedicated franchising courses could address multiple needs in an increasingly complex and competitive global environment where HEIs must stay relevant to industry and societal trends. First, these courses may help students identify self-employment as a career, provide a greater understanding of the potential risks and rewards of being a franchisee, as well as identify what type of support to expect from the franchisor. Second, these franchising courses could help the up-and-coming entrepreneur with more profound knowledge of how to expand their business using the franchise business model. Third, it could destigmatize franchising by addressing myths associated with the model (Cheatham, 2022), provide students with knowledge of the vast number of sectors that operate franchises, and expand ideas about career opportunities. Lastly, it could expose students who might traditionally be unable or unlikely to become entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills needed to pursue this form of business ownership.

Collaboration between franchisors and HEIs has emerged as a pathway for establishing programs underwritten by franchise benefactors to facilitate the inclusion of franchising curricula in HEIs. External collaboration between HEIs and industry partners is not new, and Garber (2017) reports that HEIs have engaged in partnerships with corporate entities for decades. However, an academic inter-institutional collaboration between two HEIs that are working together with the same corporate partner to meet the needs of the franchise industry is breaking new ground. Accordingly, the purpose of this qualitative evaluative case study is to examine how a large mid-western R1 University and one of the 100+ Historically College Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) partnered with a franchise corporation to create an accelerator educational program embedded within a course on franchising. The goal of this customized accelerator program was to break down barriers for women and under-represented populations to enable them to succeed in the franchise sector. Accordingly, this study addresses the following:

1. Stakeholders' characterizations of the value of this collaboration
2. Students' perceptions of franchising after completing the accelerator program
3. Critical components contributing to or detracting from the accelerator program
4. Recommendations to optimize the accelerator program
5. Hurdles these types of inter-organizational collaborations must overcome

Accordingly, we respond to calls by scholars for evaluating the impact of entrepreneurial educational programs (Oosterbeek et al., 2010) and those educational programs that are tailored to address community or industry needs (Felce, 2011) through this qualitative evaluative case study of this franchise accelerator program. The findings from this study have important implications for HEIs, specifically colleges of business that teach entrepreneurship. These HEIs are expected to create awareness and knowledge of building and growing business enterprises and provide ca-

reer preparation for their students. The findings may encourage more HEIs to partner with each other and with franchisors to educate and attract younger and more diverse talent to pursue business ownership. At the broader societal level, franchisors may identify how educational partnerships can encourage students to become franchisees and thereby grow the number of employer-owned firms among under-represented groups, thus promoting the creation of job opportunities that result in more inclusive and diverse business communities.

This article is organized into four main sections based on these aims and scope. First, we review the literature that examines the intersection of franchising and HEIs and then provide an overview of inter-organizational collaboration within HEIs. Following this, we offer a detailed overview of the specific case, which is the focus of this study. We then describe the design and methods associated with this study, along with data analysis. Lastly, we present the findings and discuss implications for practice and future research.

Literature Review

Franchising and Higher Education Institutions

Most prior studies have focused on franchising in the business world (Dada et al., 2016) rather than the intersection of franchising with HEIs. Only a limited amount of research has been conducted to understand franchising education within academia. In a content analysis of 25 standalone franchising courses offered in business schools across the U.S., Cumberland et al. (2019) found that most (71%) institutions offer only one course on franchising. Further, a wide range of textbooks was used, and 14 of the 25 courses on the topic were introductory, while 11 courses were more advanced and explored specific topics in depth. These scholars concluded that, although franchising represents a popular entry path for small business ownership, franchising education in U.S. business schools is still in a nascent stage.

Meanwhile, franchisors have begun to recognize the need to build their talent pipelines and embrace academia as a source for both employees and franchisees. FranchiseWire (2022) reports that some universities have expanded curricula to address franchising as a specialty in entrepreneurship by establishing programs that franchisor benefactors underwrite. These include the Titus Franchise Center at Palm Beach Atlantic University, the Tariq Farid Franchise Institute at Babson College, the Rosenberg International Franchise Center at the University of New Hampshire, and the Yum! Center for Global Franchise Excellence at the University of Louisville. In the last two years, plans have been announced for the University of Tennessee (UT), in partnership with Shelly Sun, the franchisor of Brightstar, to offer a new program on franchising at UT's Anderson Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation. The co-founders of Re/Max also announced their funding of the Liniger Center on Franchising at the University of Denver.

These external collaborations between organizations and HEIs fulfill various goals, including the desire by an industry to support the employment of graduates within a

specific field of study (Garber, 2017). What is rare, however, is a collaboration that occurs across different academic institutions, referred to as inter-institutional collaboration, which is discussed in the next section.

How Does Inter-Institutional Collaboration Occur in Higher Education?

Established organizations (e.g., HEIs) rely on order and stability and have entrenched routines that form barriers to collaboration with other academic institutions (Loewenberger, 2013). Kezar (2005) reviewed the literature on higher education collaboration, examining how institutions move from a culture that supports individual work to one that facilitates collaborative work among peers at different institutions. The model she proposed involves three stages by which a college comes to espouse such a collaborative culture. In Stage 1, institutional leaders *build commitment* by finding alignments between their values and external pressures. In Stage 2, where alignment exists, these leaders *commit to collaborate* by sharing access to their learnings and networks. In Stage 3, they *sustain this commitment* through structures, networks, and rewards for collaboration that can endure, a form of institutionalizing the commitment to collaborate. In this final stage, collaboration moves from a single act to a culture.

Hardy et al. (2003) built a similar model, connecting collaboration characteristics with different effects. Based on their study of eight organizations, they identified five characteristics: depth and breadth of interaction among organizations, type of coalition structure, directional flow of information, level of involvement, and degree of embeddedness. They found that high levels of involvement led to higher resource acquisition, a high degree of embeddedness increased organizations' influence, and both high involvement and a high degree of embeddedness produced knowledge. While the other characteristics might be important, involvement and embeddedness were found to be most critical to the successful effects of the collaboration.

Felce (2011) also explored the practices that encourage collaboration among higher education institutions and community businesses. She found that mutual and perceived benefits, changes in processes and outputs, partnership aims, and trust all affected the collaboration. In practice, this meant that having a successful collaboration required agreeing to and stating the aims of the partnership at the start, identifying boundaries, setting deadlines, and allowing the partnership to evolve. Furthermore, Felce (2011) reported that the collaboration experiences created cultural capital, finding that "relationships between individuals, and the individual and shared experiences will not be lost when the partnership changes or comes to an end" (p. 75). When done well, inter-institutional collaboration may be an effective strategy for universities wanting to transform themselves to grow enrollment and increase their prestige and value. More importantly, however, these collaborations could provide students an opportunity to experience learning from leaders in a specific field and network with a broader group of students than those from only their home institution. Moreover, when local economies ex-

perience a skills gap, inter-institutional collaborative partnerships between HEIs could be formed to effectively and efficiently address the skills gap, which brings benefits to local industries and the broader community (Felce, 2011).

Collaboration, however, is not easy to execute. New ideas are confronted with social and organizational barriers (Amabile, 1996). Established organizations struggle with inertia as they operate with routines and processes reinforced by bureaucratic systems. This qualitative evaluative case study focuses on how three organizations came together to address a pressing societal need, achieving greater diversity in business ownership among women and under-represented groups. This examination of a unique franchise accelerator program addresses O'Brien and Cooney's (2019) call for HEIs to provide innovative and tailored support for under-represented groups to develop entrepreneurial behaviors and competencies. Furthermore, it provides research to identify how HEIs might support inclusive entrepreneurship initiatives through collaboration. The following section details the Franchise Accelerator Program, the focus of this qualitative evaluative case study.

Description of the Accelerator Program

Family Brands, a global franchisor, sponsored a Franchise Accelerator Program in conjunction with an R1 University (R1) and an HBCU (HBCU1). Emerging within the entrepreneurial space two decades ago, accelerator programs supply startups with seed money, mentoring, and other support to reduce the failure rates of these nascent ventures (Radojevich-Kelley & Hoffman, 2012). While entrepreneurship accelerator models have been studied, none could be located that were embedded in franchising education with the goal of supporting under-represented populations. The genesis for this specific franchise accelerator program resulted from a brainstorming session between the head of Global Franchising at Family Brands, the Assistant Dean of Impact and Engagement at the HBCU1, and the Director of the franchise curriculum at the R1.

Graduate students in the MBA programs at the two institutions were invited to apply for one of ten MBA scholarships that were earmarked for women and under-represented populations, though open to all. Applications submitted by students were reviewed by a five-person panel that included academics from both universities. Ultimately six students from HBCU1 and four from R1 were awarded the ten accelerator scholarships.

Educational scholars have long suggested that effective andragogical practice must expand beyond the traditional lecture format (Knowles et al., 2015; Kolb, 1984, 2015). Kolb's four-phase experiential learning model recommends: (1) concrete experience, (2) reflective observation, (3) abstract conceptualization, and (4) active experimentation. Popular experiential learning approaches in entrepreneurship curricula often include consulting projects, accelerators, mentorships, internships, simulations, Hackathons, and Pitch-fests, among others.

Thus, this Franchise Accelerator Program was thoughtfully designed to incorporate the four phases of Kolb's (1984) experiential model. Weekly virtual meetings pro-

vided the opportunity to hear from experts and discuss reflective observations and experiences. The in-person visits to their mentors enabled students to see first-hand how franchise operations work and provided concrete learning experiences. The experiential trips to the International Franchising Association and Family Brands corporate headquarters stimulated franchising knowledge. Finally, the pitch contest to compete for business ownership exemplified active experimentation. These specific elements of this semester-long accelerator program are thoroughly detailed below.

Coursework

The Franchise Accelerator Program was embedded in one of the six online courses in franchising offered at the R1. The topics covered in the six MBA courses align with Quach et al.'s (2020) recommendation for learning modules that focus on important aspects of investigating franchising opportunities and managing a franchise business with the intent of being (or becoming) a franchisee. As part of the curriculum, the cohort of 10 scholarship winners was required to participate in weekly virtual learning sessions during the semester. The Director of the franchise curriculum, an assistant professor at R1, and the Assistant Dean at HBCU1 used these sessions to engage students with case studies, hear from a panel of experts in the franchising industry, and network with each other.

Mentorship from Franchisees

The ten scholarship recipients were each paired with an executive mentor from Family Brands. The mentors were all franchisees. The mentorship process was designed to help the students understand franchisee operations in the field. The mentors provided the following:

- Minimum of 20 hours in-unit experience, allowing the student to experience the nature of the work.
- Time spent at either the franchisee's main office or with their mentor.
- Time with the franchisee sponsoring the final award. This trip provided an understanding of the infrastructure supporting a large franchisee as well as connecting with their future partner on a personal level.

Experiential Trips

The cohort of 10 students engaged in multiple field trips as a class. These included visiting the Family Brands corporate headquarters and Washington D.C. to visit the International Franchising Association. Individually students visited their mentors. The purpose of these trips was to build connections and provide important information regarding franchising.

The Franchise Pitch and Award

Each student was given a case study to complete for the final pitch, which was designed to mirror "Shark Tank." Fictional information was provided for a five-unit group in

a U.S. city that was being considered for sale. The information provided included sales, a full Profit & Loss statement, competitive information, demographics of the area, and other operational metrics such as food safety results. The students were tasked with creating a "pitch" for these five units, including a plan on how they would address the issues provided and how they would value the business using the sales and other information provided.

Each student presented to a panel of six judges drawn from Family Brands and the benefacting franchisee. The group assessed the students' presentations. The ultimate prize was that the two top students would receive seed money and a contract with the benefactor franchisee to become franchisees themselves of a 5-unit package.

Conceptual Framework Underpinning this Evaluative Case Study

The evaluation of the Franchise Accelerator program was conceptualized based on the New World Kirkpatrick Model (NWKM). The current version of the Kirkpatrick Model not only examines the outcomes of the training program but also encourages the examination of process mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the application of the knowledge and skills learned (Gandomkar, 2018). Widely used in training program evaluations, this framework is lauded for its simplicity and approach to measuring outcomes beyond learner satisfaction (Andriushchenko et al., 2022). The model encompasses four levels of outcomes: (1) reaction, (2) learning, (3) behavior, and (4) results. Level one assesses the participant's *reaction* to the training, or put simply, the participants' satisfaction. Level two focuses on the measurement of the *learning* that occurred, as it is argued that behavior cannot change without learning. Examples of learning would include the participants' change in attitude, increase in knowledge, or an improvement in skills. The third level, *behavior*, addresses whether the participants exhibit behavioral change. The fourth and final level, *results*, refers to long-term results that are related to program participation but apply to a broader context than specific learning outcomes.

The Kirkpatrick Model has attracted critics. However, it remains widely embraced and serves as the foundation for other evaluation models (Sarri, 2011). Hence, we adopt this evaluation framework to examine the outcomes of a franchise accelerator program with respect to the reactions, learnings, and behaviors of a variety of stakeholders. Level four of this model focuses on actual results achieved after participants complete the program. However, these cannot be measured at this time.

Design and Methods

We selected a qualitative evaluative case study design for this research. In general, case study research is intended to address specific how and why questions, to examine processes, and to foster understanding of the phenomenon in its real-world context (Ellinger & McWhorter, 2016). More specifically, evaluative case studies are deemed appropriate for assessment purposes. Case study research can

Table 1. Listing of Interviewee Groups

HEI Administrators:
Developer of franchise curriculum at R1 (Assistant Professor; Creator of Franchise Accelerator).
Assistant Dean of Community Engagement at HBCU1 (Creator of Franchise Accelerator).
Dean of the College of Business at R1
Dean of the College of Business at HBCU1
Corporate Sponsors:
Head of Global Franchising at Family Brands (Creator of Franchise Accelerator).
Family Brands franchisee (judge sponsoring the prize package)
Family Brands franchisee (judge)
Students:
3 students from HBCU1
3 students from R1

embrace quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches; however, this evaluative case study embraced a combination of two complementary qualitative data collection methods. A focus group discussion with the ten MBA scholarship recipients was held mid-way through the program. At the conclusion of the program, approximately 30–45-minute individual interviews were conducted by the primary author with corporate and university stakeholders, as well as with students participating in the accelerator program.

A purposive sampling approach was used for interviewing. The primary author interviewed the individual at Family Brands who sponsored the program, the two Deans of the Colleges of Businesses, two franchise judges (out of 10 judges), six students (out of 10 who participated), and both universities' faculty members who executed the program (see [Table 1](#) for list of interviewees). These qualitative approaches for data collection enabled the authors to assess Level 1 (reaction to the program as measured by perceived value for university, corporate sponsors, and student stakeholders involved in the program), Level 2 (student knowledge demonstrated by business acumen displayed in the course and delivery of the franchise pitch to the judges from multiple stakeholder perspectives), and Level 3 (behavior as a function of students expressing indicating interest in pursuing a franchise venture).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was the primary approach for analyzing the qualitative evaluative case study data (Saldana, 2015). The data analysis process commenced with each co-author independently reading and re-reading the transcripts and focus group session from the three groups of stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives and to begin preliminary coding of data relative to

the research questions. Upon reading the transcripts, it became evident that each group of stakeholders (HEI administrators, corporate sponsors, and students) had perspectives to share about the other stakeholders. Hence, a matrix was created that captured perspectives articulated by each of the three stakeholder groups about HEIs, corporate sponsors, students, and the broader franchise industry. These perspectives were thematically analyzed, and tables were created to display the emergent themes by stakeholder perspective relative to other stakeholders. The co-authors shared their tables and themes with each other to ensure congruency of their thematic coding. Few, if any variations were noted, and there was high consistency in the coding of data and the selection of illustrative quotations for these emergent themes. To ensure trustworthiness and authenticity, the use of independent thematic coding, peer and colleague examination, and an audit trail were used.

Findings

The findings associated with this qualitative evaluative case study are presented in Tables 2–6. Within these tables, the columns represent the three groups of stakeholders: HEI administrators, corporate sponsors, and students and their corresponding perspectives for HEIs, corporate sponsors, students, and the broader franchise industry. In terms of addressing research questions 1 and 2 relative to the NWKM that underpinned this program assessment concerning Levels 1 and 2, Tables 2 and 3 report the reactions, perceptions of knowledge and learning, and behavior from a variety of stakeholders involved in this program. Tables 4–6 present the perspectives of these three groups of stakeholders with regard to their impressions of the critical components of the program, as well as potential detractors, their recommendations for fostering such inter-institutional collaborations, and hurdles that need to be overcome for such collaborations.

In terms of reactions about the perceived value of the program, HEI administrators' expressions about the value of the program for HEIs, for corporate sponsors, for students, and for the broader franchising industry were extremely comprehensive and representative of the majority of articulations relative to other stakeholders. As [Table 2](#) denotes, HEI administrators saw the benefits of such collaborations resulting in enhanced organizational image, serving a noble purpose and mission alignment concerning Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), enrollment increases, and stackable certificates, along with the creation of new curriculum space. As noted by one HEI administrator reflecting on the value to her college, "The university wanted to expose students to an industry that we did not have connectivity with other than some management practices."

Corporate sponsors concurred with HEI administrators' perceptions of enhanced institutional image in terms of positive publicity for the participating institutions. As one of the judges mentioned, "I think being just part of one of the first programs to do this is exciting for them [referring to the HEIs]. It brings a lot of positive attention to their universities." Administrators also saw the value of creating

talent, showcasing students' problem-solving capabilities, and promoting further education for the corporate sponsor. As one of the orchestrators of the program noted, "there is going to be a tangible result at the end. Family Brands will have two new franchisees who are People of Color or women. A Cinderella story."

Concerning value for the students, corporate sponsors and HEI administrators focused on the cultural exposure given the diversity of student participants, hands-on knowledge about franchising/the franchise model, and the access to networks. As the Dean of the College of Business at R1 indicated, "Legacy biases are unacceptable. Putting students in classes with students from other institutions will change their perspective forever." And, as the Assistant Dean of Community Engagement at the HBCU1 mentioned, "when you can expose students to new areas, we are opening the path for new global leaders."

These administrators also felt that the value to the broader franchise industry was creating awareness about the franchising sector, creating a talent pipeline for the industry, and offering comprehensive franchise education for the industry. Similarly, corporate sponsors echoed the notions of walking the talk concerning DEI in their own organizations through participation, recruitment benefits, and positive publicity, along with relationship building. They saw numerous benefits for students in terms of their engagement, their demonstrated takeaways from the curriculum, exposure and access and prestige through their participation. One judge noted, "I think being just part of one of the first programs to do this is exciting for them [referring to the students]."

Students felt that this program demonstrated Family Brands' authentic commitment to DEI. One student commented that Family Brands executives and franchisees were "very transparent with us that the franchisees in this space don't look and reflect their customer base." Like the HEI administrators, the students also articulated the value of getting to know and collaborate with students from other institutions, exposure to owners, brand people, and mentors, obtaining deep knowledge and practical experience, networking opportunities, and mentoring. And, ultimately, students also saw the value for the broader franchising industry in terms of attracting more diverse audiences to the industry, similar to those benefits articulated by corporate sponsors and administrators in HEIs.

In terms of Research Question 2 regarding the behavioral impact on the students, in [Table 3](#) students consistently reported that their perceptions of franchising evolved through their participation in the program, to the extent that they understood the franchising industry considerably more based upon the depth of knowledge they gleaned from the curriculum, how lucrative it could be, but also challenges associated with accessibility. Many of the students reported the shifts in their thinking about the opportunities for themselves in franchising, whether as owner-operators, or those in operations.

When reflecting about the critical components or potential detractors of the program in Research Question 3, HEI administrators spoke about a supportive climate, trust in

partners, and the need to take chances. As the director of the program at R1 noted, "both deans empowered us to do the right thing. And I want to give kudos to that because that made a huge difference, they stood out of the way, and said, 'what can we do to support you?'" Further her counterpart from HBCU1 acknowledged the importance of compatibility, "Our personal connection with each other helped us to navigate bureaucratic issues." [See [Table 4](#)].

The corporate sponsors agreed with the HEI administrators, noting the importance of partnership trust and flexibility without ego. As the judge who provided the financial package acknowledged, "the most important thing was the partnership. There were zero issues on that front. I would have thought this [trust] would be an issue for education, big corporate America, and franchisees."

There was also consistency among HEI administrators, corporate sponsors, and students relative to critical aspects of the program like the foundational knowledge provided by the curriculum, mentors/mentoring, high-touch, experiential, real-world activities (i.e., field trips), and interactions with corporate people and experts. While the pitch competition was also deemed a critical component, there were some detractors associated with the process in terms of needing to provide better direction to the judges, and needing more clarity about the prize, and perhaps the awards ceremony, which all stakeholders felt could be improved upon with very specific recommendations.

Relative to recommendations for promoting more institutional collaboration like this program, stakeholders shared several promising ideas for consideration. For administrators in HEIs, partner selection, building strong relationships with collaborators and key players were important. In terms of specific aspects of the program, expanding the scope of the program (i.e., college-wide, international), increasing the number of students and faculty instructors, and additional topics for the curriculum were noted. These same HEI administrators encouraged corporate sponsors to get more involved in academia through the pursuit of their doctoral degrees so that they could share their wealth of industry knowledge. Similarly, corporate sponsors spoke about customization, going international, the importance of action-oriented sponsors, and relationship building. Across sponsors and students, the need for more communication about expectations associated with the pitch competition were common themes. [See [Table 5](#)].

Lastly, when reflecting on hurdles that must be overcome for this type of collaboration, HEI administrators expressed numerous perspectives about the need to change mindsets about alliances and partnerships, the importance of finding passionate and committed people to support such programs, and issues associated with policies, procedures, and the siloed nature of HEIs that must be overcome. The Dean of the College of Business from HBCU1 expressed the issue of the mismatch in the cadence of operating. He said, "corporations are more nimble and can be much more flexible than academic institutions...we are buried in bureaucracy sometimes. It makes us slow to move." Both HEI administrators and corporate sponsors expressed the need for the commitment of financial resources and an invest-

Table 2. Stakeholder Perceptions of Program Value [Research Question 1]

HEI Administrator perspectives about program value for:	Corporate Sponsor perspectives about program value for:	Student perspectives about program value for:
HEIs: - Enhanced institutional image - Serving a noble purpose/mission alignment Re: DEI - Creating new/innovative program - Increased enrollments - Expanded the use of stackable certificates	HEIs: Positive publicity	HEIs: Benefits of working with and creating relationships with students from other races from another university
Corporate Sponsors: - The diversity of students afforded Family Brands the chance to identify solutions to problems they may not have seen - Creates new talent, including franchisees - Provides further education/T&D to promote franchisee growth	Corporate Sponsors: - Authentic engagement through this program makes organization better and stronger - Walking the talk results in integrity - Recruitment benefits for organization - Receiving positive acknowledgments from students - Relationship building with franchisees and students	Corporate Sponsors: Demonstrates and reinforces Family Brands DEI commitment
For Students: - Exposes students to another university and its students - Cultural exposure - Showcases the university and regional location of R1 - Gives knowledge and hands-on understanding of franchise model - Enhances resumes - Creates opportunities for access to networks	For Students: - Real world educational experience - Students walked away with an aligned perception of franchise business value - Students learning the importance of investing in the employee base - Prestige of participation - Provides a life changing experience for students - Exposes students to millionaires - Access to lifelong contacts	For Students: - Getting to know and learn from other students - Building relationships and bonding with other students - Collaborating with other students - Exposure to owners, brand people, and mentors - Providing access to and building relationships with titans of industry - Networking opportunities - Travel experiences - Mentoring - Obtained deep knowledge and practical experience on franchising - Exposure to new opportunities - The benefits of the Family Brand on resume - Confidence
Franchise Sector: - Promotes awareness around franchising sector - Creates talent pipeline - Positive publicity - Program offers comprehensive franchisee education	Franchise Sector: - Program provides hope and opportunity to women and under-represented franchisees - Diversity benefits the industry - Publicity for franchise community	Franchise Sector: It gets more diversity of people into franchise businesses and making an impact on their communities

ment of time for such ventures. Given the prize package, the hurdle mentioned by students were financial in terms of net worth requirements. [See [Table 6](#)].

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this qualitative evaluative case study is to assess the impact of the inaugural year of the Family Brands Franchise Accelerator Program. Franchising represents a unique form of self-employment, and there is growing recognition of the need to inform and guide individuals on how this specific path to ownership works (Quach et al., 2020). Further, with greater awareness of the need to build entrepreneurial capacity among under-represented popula-

tions and women, educators can use franchising curriculum to prepare these students for business ownership (Rast et al., 2020). We described how two HEIs (R1 and HBCU1), in conjunction with Family Brands came together and piloted a program that addressed this learning need.

The study confirms findings from Quach et al.'s (2020) case study that entrepreneurial education that is pragmatic and targeted can form more realistic ownership expectations and foster the development of both human capital (knowledge) and social capital (networks). The evaluation demonstrated that this type of experiential-based initiative can help students by building networking relationships, which supports the literature on accelerator programs providing valuable human capital resources (Radojevich-Kelley

Table 3. Students' Perspectives of Learning and Behavior [Research Question 2]

Student	Perceptions Shared
1: (HBCU1)	<i>Yes, it evolved in the sense that I did not realize how lucrative it could be. I knew it was a great venture to get into, but I did not know you could really take off from it. But also how hard it is. You think there is a model in front of you ...so just do what they tell you. But it is truly entrepreneurship. It could go either way. It could go as great as you want it to be or it could fail. I definitely learned a lot about it.</i>
2: (HBCU1)	<i>My perception improved. I'm very interested into getting into franchising. It is a goal. I learned how inaccessible it is. The fact that since we have gone through this program we have an advantage, but I'm still concerned about the barriers to entry. As I get into it, I want to help others get into it.</i>
3: (R1)	<i>I wasn't versed in it all. I just knew what it was. To become a franchisee you pay a franchisor. Now I know that if I decide to go into this, I will be successful. I'm just not sure I want to at this point. From an experience standpoint, I know as an operator or even working in corporate...an operator more likely...I like the everyday thing. I know I am equipped to be successful from what I learned from this process.</i>
4: (R1)	<i>It evolved a lot. The phrase is the devils in the details. It showed me the details and why this model is successful. Because you don't leave anything to chance. There are gray areas in my business and I can see now why it's not growing at a consistent pace. This model and class showed me a lot about how and why franchising succeeds the way it does.</i>
5: (HBCU1 - winner)	<i>It enriched and got deeper from the practical application, but it was the actual course content and the content of the course was exceptionally well done. It drew deeper on my knowledge of a variety of industries. The keynote speakers outside of the industry like the dry-cleaning business enriched our understanding about the pathway to ownership. It reduced my anxiety about it to be honest and made me feel this is obtainable. All you really need is a jumpstart. Then you keep these relationships, and you leave the program feeling smarter and the path to ownership is going to be quicker and understanding the route to get there.</i>
6: (R1 - winner)	<i>I did not fully understand all that went into owning and operating a franchise. So that deeper sense of knowledge of franchising is valuable from this program. For me, I'm a little conservative. I know what it takes to create a brand and make it successful. I know how much of a hurdle that is if you don't already have brand knowledge. So franchising is that nice balance of having brand recognition in a community before starting a company.</i>

Table 4. Stakeholder Perceptions of Critical Components/Detractors [Research Question 3]

HEI Administrator perspectives about critical components/detractors for:	Corporate Sponsor perspectives about critical components/detractors for:	Student perspectives about critical components/detractors for:
HEIs: <u>Critical Components:</u> - Supportive climate - Trust in partners - Take chances	HEIs: <u>Critical Components:</u> - Flexibility without ego - Power of fabulous partnerships - Use of case studies - Partnership trust	HEIs: None
Corporate Sponsors: <u>Critical Components:</u> - Mentors - Budget - Field experiences <u>Detractors:</u> - Inconsistency in mentoring.	Corporate Sponsors: <u>Critical Components:</u> - Flexibility without ego - Power of fabulous allyships/partnerships is a component for value creation	Corporate Sponsors: <u>Detractors:</u> - Video filming of program - Timeliness of pitch information - Awards ceremony execution suffered from being virtual and focusing only on winners
Students: <u>Critical Components:</u> - Knowledge - High touch/experiential <u>Detractors:</u> - Lack of clarity on details (timing issue; prize)	Students: <u>Critical Components:</u> - Interactions with corporate people added value for students - Mentorship - Trips that facilitated engagement with field leaders - Pitch case study - Panel of experts on virtual Monday night webinars <u>Detractors:</u> - Lack of clarity on the prize	Students: <u>Critical Components:</u> - Real world application - Coursework: readings and discussion panels - Mentoring (1 exception) - Pitch case competition <u>Detractors:</u> - Lack of clarity in understanding the expectations and outcomes - Balancing everything - Virtual awards ceremony failed to uplift the entire group

& Hoffman, 2012). With respect to critical components of the program, the students identified the value of weekly virtual seminars with industry experts and the value of the

mentoring relationships that were formed to build their knowledge, confirming prior research on mentoring (Sarri, 2011). Finally, to overcome barriers to inter-institutional

Table 5. Stakeholder Perspectives about Recommendations for Program Improvement [Research Question 4]

HEI Administrators perspectives about recommendations for:	Corporate Sponsor perspectives about recommendations for:	Student perspectives about recommendations for:
HEIs: • Focus on scope of franchise business size • Seek larger groups of students • Expand the number of instructors • Expand beyond school of business to create college-wide experience • Consider faculty research opportunities • Partner selection • You must build strong relationships with key players/collaborators • Focus more on business/financial planning with students	HEIs: • Understand goals to inform partnerships • Go international • Touch more students/more people in franchisee community • Leverage creativity/innovation to ensure program is disruptive	HEIs: • Extend program time (two semesters) • Understand student goals to customize outcomes • Promote more teamwork among students • Provide an advanced schedule of events/time commitments • Provide more communication on front end of program • Make sure everyone involved has similar motivation and commitment to program • Organize more trips and optimize them • Involve students as guests to participate in future programs to give back (pledge \$ or serve as sponsor) • Create a network from fellows of the program
Corporate Sponsors: • Encourage company leaders to pursue doctorates to share their industry knowledge	Corporate Sponsors: • Ensure action-oriented mentors • Build relationships • Better preparation of judges / mentors • Corporate sponsors could be mentor for other franchisees to establish an alliance • Provide students full transparency • Involve more lending institutions	Corporate Sponsors: • Make sure everyone involved has same motivation and commitment • It has to be honest in what it is • Success must translate into immediate ownership • Tailor prize outcomes • Students can communicate the value of program on LinkedIn to support Family Brands by quantifying impact of prizes • Improve awards ceremony structure
Students: None	Students: • Better prepare students for program • Better communication • Spend time with mentors in their markets • Consider different pitch cases for students	Students: None
Franchise Sector: None	Franchise Sector: None	Franchise Sector: • Program can become a feeder for small business and communities if it turns out more under-represented and women owners

Table 6. Stakeholder Perspectives About Hurdles to Overcome [Research Question 5]

HEI Administrator perspectives about program value for:	Corporate Sponsor perspectives about program value for:	Student perspectives about program value for:
HEIs: • Change the mindset within educational institutions about alliances and partnerships • Need more flexible policies and procedures • Must find people who are passionate to work and support such programs • Need Deans who share vision for program and then get out of the way • Bureaucracy of HEIs • Creating awareness of program • Siloed nature of Higher Education – Need to be cross-disciplinary • Trying to institutionalize creates barriers	HEIs: • True commitment of partners	HEIs: None
Corporate Sponsors: • Potential mismatch of cadence of timing	Corporate Sponsors: • Considerable cost in time, money, and resources • True commitment of partners	Corporate Sponsors: None
Students: None	For Students: None	Students: • Financial limitations/net worth requirements

collaborations within HEIs, our findings corroborate the need for dedicated individuals with a shared mission, support from those in senior positions, and mutual trust between the actors (Felce, 2011; Kezar, 2005). From these findings we recommend the following practices to guide future educators pursuing inter-institutional efforts and franchise accelerator programs as seen in [Table 7](#):

Table 7. Recommended Practices to Guide Inter-Institutional Collaborations and Franchise Accelerator Programs

Inter-Institutional / Corporate Collaborations
Chose partners who share similar missions
Focus on the relationships between the actors
Ensure top leadership supports the effort with time, money, and resources
Encourage top leadership steps out of the day-to-day
Recognize what each partner can offer
Communicate frequently
Work outside the bureaucracy by not trying to standardize
Franchise Accelerator Programs
Iron out the details of the program ahead of time
Communicate details to students ahead of time (e.g., field visits/ trips)
Clarify expectations with students on work products expected
Embrace experiential learning (case studies; trips; pitches; expert panels)
Create space to learn and connect (weekly synchronous sessions; field experiences)
Provide mentors who are willing to be transparent and give time
Consider award prize packages carefully; if possible, customize
Provide rubrics ahead of time for award-type competitions
Ensure judging at any pitch event recognizes all students
If possible, handle the award ceremony in person
Do not allow public relations to take center stage
Ensure funding can sufficiently build students' learning and recognize accomplishments

Methodologically, there is much to be gained from evaluative case studies as they help to clarify what aspects of a program work well and those that need further refinement.

Specifically employing a qualitative approach provides a richer and more nuanced understanding from stakeholders. The findings in this case provide insight to academic institutions, corporations, and policymakers for designing educational programming to address specific industry needs. It is recommended that HEIs include in their entrepreneurship programs partnerships with franchisors and franchisees so students can be exposed to a sector that has been under-represented yet, one with strong career potential. It is also suggested that HEI accelerator programs focus on assisting under-represented populations and women, who face more obstacles and challenges to access the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Finally, given the external pressure on HEIs to meet students' needs within a cost-constrained budgetary environment, seeking inter-institutional collaborations can allow expansion with less financial investment.

Limitations and Future Research

As with all research studies, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged. One limitation of this evaluative qualitative case study is that it provides initial impressions of the program's inaugural year with only two distinct universities, a specific franchisor, and a cohort of 10 students. Therefore, results of this case must be carefully considered before assuming any transferability to other contexts. Additionally, the sample size of 10 is small and not all students were interviewed, though all did participate in the focus group. With respect to this specific inter-institutional study, longitudinal research is underway to track the students' careers from this cohort. Additionally, Family Brands and both HBCU1 and R1 are repeating the initiative in 2023. As such, research will continue with the next cohort of students in year two.

As the potential for franchise accelerator programs in academia gains traction and more collaborations between HEIs and corporate partners occurs, future studies should be carried out. First, more evaluation research studies like this one can help stakeholders better determine whether engaging in this type of experiential learning program fosters innovation, competitiveness, or other skillsets among students that are relevant to business creation, employment, and industry talent diversification. Second, studies could incorporate more and varied types of educational institutions, and expanded array of franchise benefactors drawn from other franchise industry sectors. Lastly, such studies could be conducted in other cultural contexts, providing future opportunities for comparative research.

Submitted: October 01, 2022 MDT. Accepted: January 01, 2023 MDT. Published: April 01, 2023 MDT.



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