INTERNATIONALIZATION AT PUBLIC REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER

EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY THROUGH CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES

by

BENJAMIN G. CECIL

(Under the Direction of Timothy R. Cain)

ABSTRACT

The interconnected nature of today's world continues to permeate most aspects of modern life. Known as globalization, countries, economies, and people are all closer than ever before given increases in technology, innovation, and capital. These external pressures of globalization meet higher education in a process known as internationalization—explaining how institutions respond through policy and practice to an adapting sociopolitical landscape. Much is known related to internationalization in higher education, including the driving factors of finances, reputational prestige, and the quest for world-class status. Even with internationalization being common practice, public regional institutions are neglected within the literature and overall understanding of international activity in higher education. Using the theoretical perspectives of academic capitalism and institutional theory, this study contributes to the literature by examining the nature of internationalization at public regional institutions through the unit of Confucius Institutes. A single-site case study approach was used to understand how Confucius Institutes play a role in overall internationalization given the environment of the public regional institution and geopolitical factors of international activity.

Participants identified several factors for internationalization at the case site, including leadership, a connection to the student experience, and the interconnectedness with the local community. In addition, sociopolitical and state level political factors as well as the local context all played a role in creating an environment that supported internationalization. Participants noted the Confucius Institute as an important part of the campus community and the local environment, recognizing the role that it played in overall internationalization efforts both within the campus and community. These findings illustrated a new understanding of internationalization at public regional institutions and further support the idea that internationalization within this specific institutional type takes a different form and is driven by different motivators. In addition, these findings support an increased need for internationalization within the public regional institutional space, contradicting the idea that internationalization is antithetical to the mission of public regional institution. Finally, this study found that the controversies of Confucius Institutes, while still relevant, were misapplied within the context of a public regional institution.

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DEDICATION

To my late grandparents—Dorothy McCurry Graves, Lamar Ross Graves Sr., Gertrude Fritts Cecil, and Ralph Hillsman Cecil—for whom higher education was never an option, but whose sacrifice, hard work, dedication, and love formed a foundation of success and opportunity still felt by generations beyond, and to come.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The changing nature of the world today is evident across social, political, and economic bounds as people, places, and cultures become increasingly interconnected. Simultaneous shifts across labor markets, access to capital, and technological innovations continue to promote growth while also furthering stratification as a result of rapid societal and economic changes. This process of globalization—the shift of world economies to a more global scale causing countries, systems, and institutions to become increasingly reliant on others for capital, resources, and funding (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997)—defined the world stage and decision-making for both the public and private sectors upon its introduction in the latter part of the twentieth century. Globalization promotes an environment of exponential growth and opportunity for some, while furthering the existing chasm between areas already divided by access to and usage of capital (Igarashi & Saito, 2014). Overall, the duality of globalization contributes to a complicated, nuanced understanding of the benefits and challenges of increased interconnection and reliance worldwide.

Globalization exists across both public and private sectors, providing opportunity for challenge, growth, and financial prosperity. The benefits of international activity in the private sector are clear, particularly within the context of capitalism worldwide. For higher education, the idea of globalization can appear contrary to its mission, especially for publicly funded institutions and their roles of education, community stewardship, and

service. However, universities in the United States (U.S.) and elsewhere are not immune to changes resulting from such interconnection (Deem, 2001), fostering a complex link between higher education and globalization (Kauppinen, 2015). This relationship is a driving force behind a system of higher education entering the global market within the competitive environment of interconnected economies and politics.

The expansion of higher education involved several factors from the 1950s and beyond, including globalization. A changing environment of economics and labor markets of the 1980s required institutions to engage in decision-making that kept pace with the shifting international economic marketplace. The introduction of globalization into higher education is now known as *internationalization*, defined by Altbach & Knight (2007) as policies and actions that institutions of higher education take in response to globalization. Although Altbach & Knight utilized the word "cope" to contextualize institutional responses to globalization, coping often carries a negative connotation of something higher education *must* deal with as opposed to something it *wants* to deal with. While coping with the challenges of an increasingly globalized society, many found that this coping provided new and unforeseen opportunities for higher education.

Internationalization takes many forms on today's campus, including mobility of people, education abroad, research partnerships, exchange agreements, and cultural learning centers. Often, the focus of internationalization lies with student mobility—and for good reason: over 1,075,000 international students enrolled in 2020 at postsecondary institutions in the United States (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2021). Beyond enrollment, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce noted an economic contribution of $45 billion from international students to the U.S. economy in 2018 (IIE, 2019). International

student recruitment is an important financial consideration for many institutions, with international students often paying nearly full tuition and fee amounts (Cantwell, 2015). An understanding of internationalization also honors the environment of the institution itself, including governance structures, location, funding sources, and geopolitical context. As such, internationalization takes place in myriad ways across institutions, dependent on factors both within and far from institutional control.

Internationalization is a process of institutional change in response to external stimuli in combination with internal pressures. A recent example of internationalization began in 2004 with the introduction of the Confucius Institute into the U.S. higher education sector (Hartig, 2012). Confucius Institutes seek to promote Chinese language and culture as partnerships between a non-Chinese institution and a Chinese university, overseen by the Chinese government (Peterson, 2017). These Institutes, however, are rife with controversies from multiple fronts. Concerns related to curricular control, academic freedom, and shared governance dominate the discourse internally within higher education, due to the ambiguous nature of governance within the Confucius Institute (Peterson, 2017). Policymakers have raised concerns about the purpose of Confucius Institutes, accusing them of serving as a propaganda arm for the Chinese government. The United States Department of State recently classified Confucius Institutes as a foreign agent, highlighting their perception as political entities within the United States. What once opened the door to international activity, particularly with the strong market of Chinese international students, has now become a geopolitical and economic quagmire for many institutions as the relationship between Washington and Beijing deteriorates.

Problem Statement

The literature has not kept pace at with the prevalence of internationalization in higher education, particularly with public regional institutions. Internationalization research predominately focuses on the research university with a small but growing body of literature connecting internationalization and community colleges. The focus on research universities often cites well-documented motivations to international activity applied within the context of rankings, competition, and prestige. Contrastingly, the missions of community colleges, with lower cost and open-access opportunities began drawing international students to these institutions (Manns, 2014). What is missing, however, is the connection of internationalization to regional institutions. The literature tells some regarding scope, purpose, and function of public regional institutions within higher education, but the scholarship fails to connect public regional institutions into the larger discourse of other topics impacting higher education, like internationalization. This gap will only continue to grow as higher education navigates through increased globalization and funding challenges, calling on researchers to further understand the role internationalization occupies within U.S. higher education across institutional types.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand internationalization at public regional institutions of higher education in the United States, using Confucius Institutes as the lens of analysis. The idea of internationalization and public regional institutions seemingly contradicts the mission that many of these institutions espouse, focusing on serving the communities in which they are located. With little known related to international activity at public regional institutions and the presence of Confucius Institutes therein, this study

sits at the intersection of multiple phenomena within higher education internationalization. The study of Confucius Institutes also offered a unique perspective by which to understand motivations of regional institutional leaders in internationalizing as the political context of the Confucius Institutes continues to change. Finally, the presence of Confucius Institutes within some public regional institutions provided the insight into how internationalization is understood and practiced by institutions with a different set of challenges and priorities. Ultimately, this study contributes to the limited body of knowledge of internationalization at public regional institutions while understanding the role Confucius Institutes may play in the process.

Research Questions

The goals of this study were two-pronged: (1) to understand the phenomena of internationalization at public regional institutions, and (2) to understand the context of the Confucius Institute as a component of international activity at such institutions. This study was guided by three main research questions, providing context to the nature of internationalization and the potential role of Confucius Institutes in international engagement.

1. In what ways do leaders of public regional institutions define and understand internationalization?

2. How do leaders of public regional institutions describe the nature and purpose of Confucius Institutes?

3. What political, social, and economic influences shape a public regional institutions' decision making related to Confucius Institutes?

Research Methods

This study followed a single-site case study framework (Merriam, 1988, 1998). The case is a public regional university with a Confucius Institute present on the campus. This approach highlighted the role of the external environment in which the case is situated, including governance, location, and geopolitical factors. The case was selected based on institutional factors and location through purposive sampling, as discussed further in Chapter 3. Utilizing case study methodology provides an opportunity to rely on a conceptual framework and literature review to further contextualize all aspects of the case, leading to "thick description" (Merriam, 1998) and a full picture of the case within its context.

Data were collected through three main sources: interviews, observations, and document analysis. Purposive sampling was also incorporated to identify participants for interviews; as a part of interviews, I used a snowball sampling process to ask for other recommendations of those within the bounds of the case who may also provide context to the phenomena. Prior to data collection, an a priori list of codes was created deductively, guided by the literature and conceptual framework. These codes were then refined and updated inductively through the process of data analysis. Internal validity was ensured using triangulation, peer examination, and researcher positionality. Beyond these characteristics of high-quality qualitative research (Tracy, 2010) an audit trail was kept and reviewed throughout data collection and analysis to ensure reliability. Finally, the reliance on thick description within the case supports external validity of the study design.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study encompasses two major theoretical perspectives in higher education: academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) and institutional theory (Dacin et al., 2002; Kezar, 2018). Slaughter & Leslie (1997) defined academic capitalism as "market-like efforts to secure external moneys" (p. 8) on behalf of the institution. Academic capitalism assists in framing the nature of internationalization through an economic lens, incorporating the movement to a neoliberal economic perspective. A neoliberal perspective created the environment for globalization to prosper economically, leading to the beginnings of internationalization within higher education today. As a theoretical understanding, academic capitalism seeks to explain how universities and their capital (both financial and people) engage in the global marketplace and serves to contextualize internationalization as a means for revenue diversification.

As internationalization became more commonplace in higher education, it morphed into a change agent within the sector. Institutional theory consists of a broad, theoretical approach to understand change (Kezar, 2018). Institutional theory also complements the neoliberal perspective at the roots of academic capitalism, with Kezar (2018) citing neo-institutional theory to bridge institutional change to the broader context of societal change offered through neoliberalism. Within the context of institutional theory, this study relies on the concept of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Through similar environmental conditions, institutions often come to resemble each other (Hawley, 1986); this perspective underpins the notion of public regional

institutions moving into the realm of international activity given their environment of change, resource dependency, and ability to engage internationally.

Potential Contributions & Significance of the Study

This study sought to address several significant gaps in the internationalization of higher education literature and connect the scholarship of internationalization to public regional institutions. While a gap in the literature is not sufficient to indicate significance, little is known by way of internationalization at public regional institutions. With the important role and placement of these institutions within the United States, increased understanding is needed as they continue to serve a cornerstone of American higher education (Fryar, 2015). This became particularly salient as much of the literature review in this study relies on an examination of internationalization in the eyes of research universities. Further understanding internationalization at public regional institutions also contributes to an understanding of the organizational nature of such institutions, including the challenges faced related to funding and organizational context.

As the findings show in Chapter 4, internationalization within this case site was driven by leadership, the student experience, a mission-driven approach, and the benefit to the local community. Additionally, the Confucius Institute played a part in internationalization, but was not a motivating factor. The discussion of this paper highlights the role of the Confucius Institute in internationalization of public regional institutions, while also recognizing this represents only one way these institutions may participate in international activity. The findings of this study contribute to the larger conversation of international activity, broadly, and challenge the higher education sector

to further conceptualize the role public regional institutions may play in overall

internationalization of higher education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter includes a review of the scholarship related to the major areas addressed by this study: (1) internationalization of higher education in the United States (U.S.), (2) public regional institutions of higher education in the United States, and (3) Confucius Institutes. To fully understand the context of the research questions, I provide a progressive approach of conceptualizing internationalization from its infancy to the current state in the broader scope of higher education. While numerous scholars contributed to the discourse on public regional institutions, a substantial gap exists connecting the concept of internationalization to public regional institutions of higher education. To address this gap, I identify challenges and practices of internationalization and apply them to the nature of public regional institutions as described by the literature. Finally, in examining Confucius Institutes, I rely heavily on work from the political science and international relations fields, with much written about Confucius Institutes stemming from research related to the concept of *soft power* (Nye, 1990, 2004, 2009). I conclude Chapter 2 with a discussion of the theoretical concepts constructing the conceptual framework guiding this study.

Internationalization of Higher Education in the United States

Internationalization of higher education in the United States comprises a multifaceted process, structured by the forces of globalization that exist externally to

institutions themselves. The combination of geopolitical, economic, and policy level conditions create an environment under which institutional level internationalization occurs. As it is known today, internationalization represents the convergence of myriad areas of societal change that directly influence the nature of higher education. Examples include the changing nature of labor markets (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), increased wage inequality based on changing societal value of a higher education degree (Mouw & Kalleberg, 2010), unbundling of the faculty role (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015), increased demand for higher education (Thelin, 2011), and further pressure to seek reputational prestige (Hazelkorn, 2009, 2015, 2017, 2018) and external funding (Lacy, Tandberg, & Hu, 2017), particularly for state institutions. The progress of internationalization generally follows the path of globalization and the evolving nature of economic markets from the era of massification to today. The following section outlines the historical context of globalization in higher education, leading to the beginnings of internationalization as it is known today.

Historical Context of Global Activity in Higher Education

An international presence in higher education is not new and has evolved with the changing nature of world systems and trends over time. In the 20th century, several historical events led to an increased focus and presence of international activity as the world system began to globalize. Like other processes of change, the path to internationalization was not linear, with institutions working to keep pace with the changing nature of society, culture, and the economy. The end of World War II was notably influential in the development of international higher education in the United States (de Wit, 2002). The establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific,

and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) took place just over two months after the end of World War II (UNESCO, n.d.), emphasizing the importance of global interconnectedness and sociocultural understanding as a means for rebuilding not only physical space but also globalized perspectives following the devastation of the War. With less physical damage from the war as compared to its European allies, the U.S. was able to focus attention on rebuilding societal bonds through education. This allowed the United States to get a head start in establishing a reputation as a desirable place for international students to pursue higher education.

Precursors to Internationalization

Massification and the Changing Nature of the Faculty Role

Closer to home, enrollments surged on U.S. campuses as many enrolled in higher education using G.I. Bill benefits (Thelin, 2011). As this changed the idea of attending college and created accessibility for the common person, increased enrollments led to what scholars refer to as "massification" of higher education (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 1997), where enrollments increased in parallel with increased societal value placed on higher education. Massification required institutions to not only reconsider their mission statements and access points, but also grow their faculty, staff, and services to students. Prior to increased enrollments, faculty often held multiple positions within the organization outside of today's general teaching, research, and service responsibilities. As growth occurred, faculty roles became more specialized, leading to what Gehrke & Kezar (2015) referred to as the further "unbundling" of the faculty role. This unbundling permitted faculty to shed some of their student-services responsibilities in lieu of the creation of student affairs as a vocation (Calhoun, 1996),

thereby allowing for greater time with research and knowledge creation (Lawson, 1991). Ultimately, this led faculty to be able to engage with the international marketplace as their roles as researchers and knowledge generators became more solidified.

The concept of unbundling within the faculty is important to consider, as it altered the trajectory of the professoriate. Although the faculty role began to shift prior to the changing nature of the economy, the economic changes certainly did not slow the pace of unbundling. Several factors outside of the university contributed to specialization, notably the political and economic forces of the 1970s changing the overall structure of the labor market. These shifts increased pressure on higher education institutions to prepare individuals for active participation in the labor market, as new jobs and fields required specialized training (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). At the same time, faculty pressure related to research and scholarship continued to increase, shifting some faculty away from multidisciplinary work across the University and allowing for insulation within their departments.

These shifts are akin to smaller tributaries; in the beginning of the 1980s these tributaries spilled into the massive river of change at the convergence of faculty specialization, institutional growth, and an evolving, globalized economy. The 1980s ushered in an era in which faculty made significant moves to involvement in the global marketplace during political and economic changes. This period was one in which professional work of the faculty began to be patterned differently, where engagement in the marketplace amid an ever-globalizing economy became commonplace (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Advances in science and technology provided opportunities for faculty— who over the previous years developed further expertise due to unbundling—to

participate in the processes of bringing products and processes to market through governmental, corporate, and university-level partnerships. Participation in other companies or research ventures was commonplace, capitalizing on their knowledge in a way the structure of the economy and nature of the faculty role did not previously allow. Many of these changes are attributed to the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, where universities were able to own, patent, and trademark federally funded research taking place on their campuses (Mowery et al., 2001).

Internationalization Beyond the Professoriate

Faculty were not the only ones to engage in international activity, but their direct connection to the economy via their knowledge base became a starting point for many institutions to internationalize. Notably, international students have been on U.S. campuses for years even prior to the establishment of the visa categories used today. Notably, the F visa (student non-immigrant visa) was codified via the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 and the Fulbright-Hays act of 1961 created the J visa for exchange visitors (Ruiz, 2014). This process occurred in parallel with societal changes as globalization became a part of life across society through the prosperity of technology and innovation. The 1980s saw technological advances that provided direct conduits for increased global connection, streamlining processes, and development of worldwide networks of production. Continuing into the 21st century, internationalization became a lucrative proposition, not only for increased institutional prestige on the global stage, but also for the funding opportunities for embracing internationalization as economies began to interconnect in ways previously inaccessible.

This draw to international activity occurred simultaneously as many institutions experienced significant changes in the 1980s and 1990s. These changes related to issues with funding and increasing institutional prestige and rankings, particularly for research universities (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). As state funding became more volatile for many public institutions (Lacy, Tandberg, & Hu, 2017), universities acknowledged the financial benefit of recruiting students, faculty, and postdoctoral researchers from outside the United States. This competitive pool not only offered mechanisms to diversify revenue streams, but also propelled many to higher rankings (Delgado-Márquez, Hurtado-Torres, & Bondar, 2011). Such outreach led to increased industry funding through multinational corporations and industry-university partnerships, further propelling rankings and offsetting the financial volatility of state-level funding.

Understanding the context of internationalization as we know it today requires a look back to the interconnected nature of higher education with society, noting the shifts in that relationship across various points in the latter half of the twentieth century. The growth of the U.S. higher education sector in tandem with substantial economic changes and innovation began the initial push of internationalization highlighted by the theoretical perspective of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), which I discuss later. The link between internationalization and economic growth and prosperity bolsters the notion that much of internationalization stems from economic and financial motivations in line with the changing nature of the economy and labor market. In the subsequent section, I discuss how internationalization in today's context appears as an element of policy and practice within the higher education sector.

Internationalization as Policy and Practice in Today's Context

  The context of internationalization today situates several competing and often conflicting perspectives related to external economic forces and institutional missions, goals, and funding challenges. At the heart of internationalization lies two competing ideas: the perceived benefits of a globalized society, economy, and world juxtaposed against the challenging financial situation of public higher education in the United States. It is a constant balancing act between the creation of a globalized citizenry and resource dependency—a knot that is interconnected through the economy, industry, and higher education governance. The nature of internationalization within these two broader themes exposes several perspectives this study considers, including institutional mission; the role of rankings, growth, and prestige seeking behavior; socio-and geopolitical challenges of internationalized higher education; and the role that institutions play in furthering an international agenda for myriad individual reasons. This section speaks to the current nature of internationalization understanding these perspectives within the broader higher education scholarship. Later in Chapter 2, I connect these perspectives into the context of the public regional institution and its specific characteristics and role within the larger higher education sector.

Role of Rankings and the Quest for the World-Class University

  Like other industries, higher education is competitive. The common belief is that the more elite or prestigious an institution can seem, the more competitive it is, and the higher its ranking (Hazelkorn, 2015). Altbach (2003) referenced the concept of world-class universities as an aspirational goal for many, with characteristics of world-class including excellence in research, top quality professors with job security, academic

freedom, self-governance, and adequate facilities and funding (pg. 6). Ironically, the quest for world-class status is a challenging notion, as the metrics for world-class status are difficult to articulate and prove challenging to quantify (Hazelkorn, 2018). Even if the pinnacle of world-class may never be reached for most institutions, the constant move towards world-class status defines the decision-making and resource allocation factors among institutional leaders.

Competition in higher education still exists for resources, capital, and prestige on the national and international stages even if the quest for world-class designation is a zero-sum game. The financial situations for public versus private institutions are different; however, all institutions benefit from enrolling the maximum number of students they are equipped to handle. To compete for the best and the brightest students, universities often offer different forms of aid (Allen & Wolniak, 2019) while also touting the campus experience that sets them apart from other competitors (Hossler, 2000). Entities like the *U.S. News and World Report* publish yearly rankings and while most of these are truly arbitrary and provide no concrete information related to the quality of the education (Meredith, 2004), the societal value on perception of rankings creates competition for not only students, but also institutions.

Increased competition for institutions and the quest for rankings is multi-faceted, requiring contextual understanding of motivations and rationales. Hazelkorn (2017) wrote extensively on the geopolitics of rankings, noting that such rankings were inevitable as higher education internationalized and became a part of the world economy. Higher education is a competitive field of power, and rankings influence political and economic resources, status, and positionality (Marginson, 2016). Part of the rationale is the

commodification of knowledge, "brain power" and the belief that higher education is a way to succeed in a global economy, resulting from a shift in the definition of internalization from cultural exchange to a "cross-border movement of knowledge" (Hazelkorn, 2017, pg. 10). The competition within higher education extends beyond the borders of campuses and into industry and business as well, with the value of a university's education often seen in its job placement rate (Dill & Soo, 2005), neglecting the fact that such placement rates also may be linked to perceived prestige of the institution itself. Prestige is a key part of the U.S. sector overall, with institutions bolstered by the international perception of U.S. higher education being an access point for opportunity and success.

Within the context of the U.S. public higher education sector, an increase in rankings catalyzes several positive externalities for the institution itself. Related to international student mobility, institutions with higher rankings often are more appealing to international students. International student mobility is often related to "push-pull factors" (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 82); those encourage a student to study outside of their home country, and those that entice an international student to a particular institution outside of their home country to a specific location. Many of these pull factors relate to the perceived quality of education, amenities offered, as well as context and promise of the U.S. higher education sector. This perceived quality of education ties directly to the importance of rankings, reputation, and context of the institution within the United States, benefitting all U.S. institutions in the eyes of international perception and as a pull factor into U.S. higher education.

Competition and increased rankings often lead to increased resources or changes in enrollment patterns for public institutions (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Public institutions, as the name denotes, receive some of their funding from state-appropriated sources. Different states appropriate dollars differently in their overall prioritization of higher education (Okunade, 2004). Even with state and other appropriated dollars through Federal sources, a gap exists (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015)—this gap is where competition shines in the higher education sector. The more competitive an institution, the higher the ranking, and the greater the demand for their services. For public institutions, with missions likely directly connected to serving the citizens of their respective state (Goldstein, Paprocki, & Osborne 2019), the ability then enroll full fee-paying international students is enticing. The assumption of international students as revenue sources is not fact in all situations, but some institutions are able to generate additional income by enrolling additional international students (Cantwell, 2015).

The scholarship on student mobility to the United States (e.g., international students) is rich, with a great number of scholars contributing to this body of knowledge. One of the criticisms remains the notion of understanding international students as a monolithic group, removing the agency of culture and decision-making around push-pull factors from research. This becomes important, particularly when discussing the notion of student choice and the push-pull factors to the United States. As mentioned, a common theme in the literature refers to international students choosing institutions of study based on rankings (Nicholls, 2018). While this certainly may be the case in some instances, this neglects to focus on the contributions of community colleges, public regional institutions, and technical colleges within the international mobility landscape of U.S. higher

education. Furthermore, this perspective neglects the international student population itself. There is an inherent value of international students in the U.S. that exists far beyond any quantifiable dollar amount. This simple fact often is overshadowed by the revenue argument and focus on pull factors.

The context of internationalization needs to include all institutional types within the higher education sector, highlighting the important nuance of differences among institutional types related to the policies and practices of internationalization. It must also remember the non-financial contributions of international students to the U.S. sector overall. Looking ahead, I define and situate the public regional institution within the broader understanding of U.S. higher education, emphasizing the unique contributions of these institutions and the varied contexts in which they operate.

Public Regional Institutions of Higher Education in the United States

Much of the scholarship and discussion centers the role that research institutions play in driving international activity in the current higher education environment. While recent work honored the role that community colleges are beginning to play in internationalization (e.g., student mobility) (Jennings, 2017), little is known about internationalization and the public regional institution. This section of the literature review provides an overview of the public regional institution today, discuss the challenges in nestling internationalization in the context of the public regional institution. Additionally, this section brings together the scholarship of internationalization and public regional institutions, applying the ideas and motivations of internationalization to the context and unique characteristics of the public regional institution.

Defining the Regional/Comprehensive University

Regional institutions are an understudied area of higher education. Defining them can present challenges, especially when the scholarship and larger public perception of higher education is situated within the paradigm of the research university. It is important to not only understand the differences in institutional characteristics within a regional institution, but also the unique role and large contributions they play in education and service to their communities. There are approximately 430 regional institutions in the United States and territories with 40% of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) being classified as regional comprehensive institutions (Orphan 2018a). Many of these institutions began as other institutional types, such as teachers' colleges, night schools, and other specialized educational institutions. Fryar (2015) offered commentary to assist in delineating the difference between regional, comprehensive, and institutions of this type:

> Compass schools, branch campuses, regional universities—these are all terms used interchangeably when referring to comprehensive universities. But most often these institutions are defined as what they are not: Comprehensive universities are not community colleges. Comprehensive universities are not research universities. Comprehensive universities are not flagship institutions. (Fryar, 2015, p. 23).

Harcleroad & Ostar (1987) also offered the following characteristics of public regional institutions:

- o   Publicly established and/or controlled by state governance systems
- o   Primarily comprehensive institutions emphasizing professional programs

- o Predominantly awarding baccalaureate and master's degrees

- o Meeting diverse needs of different states particularly at the baccalaureate and master's levels, but including less than baccalaureate programs and doctoral programs in selected professional fields

- o Requiring faculty to reach and remain at the cutting edge of knowledge in their fields

- o Predominately open-access institutions that emphasize equal opportunity, and

- o Receiving primary funding from state taxes, with a tradition of low or moderate tuition charges

Fryar's (2015) definition noted the interchangeable use of regional vs. comprehensive terminology when referring to these types of institutions. For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to use the term "public regional institution" to match the general approach used in this definition and among the literature in this subfield.

There are other variables that contribute to the definition of a public regional institution, including the types of degrees awarded, Carnegie Classification, and the student enrollment (Fryar, 2015). Additionally, the role which regional institutions play in their local communities is an important factor in understanding the scope and context of the regional institution (Orphan, 2018b). Schneider & Deane (2015) argued for utilizing the definition provided by the American Association of State Colleges & Universities for their member institutions (AASCU, 2014) to define the full picture of such institutions: "public colleges, universities, and systems whose members share a learning and teaching-centered culture, a historic commitment to underserved

populations, and a dedication to research and creativity that advances their regions' economic progress and cultural development" (pg. 7). While there are differences in how scholars understand traits of the public regional institution, nearly all reference these institutions as being mission-driven and access-oriented.

Context, Characteristics, and Missions of the Regional Institution

The regional institution evolved from other more specialized forms of higher education with an emphasis on students and access (Fryar, 2015). Beginning in the first half of the 19th century, the establishment of normal schools in the United States created mostly teacher-training programs; this growth of high school populations necessitated an increased in teachers precipitating an uptick in enrollment for teachers in training programs (Ogren, 2005). With the increasing demand for such credentials, many institutions shifted their focus from a normal school to that of a teachers' college, where the understanding of public regional institutions begins today. As these institutions continued to evolve, the public regional/comprehensive university took the shape of a regional/branch campus or a smaller institution serving the local community (Orphan, 2018b) with lesser appeal to students from outside of the area.

The characteristics of such institutions have changed and adapted as demographics have shifted in higher education. Harcleroad & Ostar (1987) recognized the shifts in demographics of public regional institutions occurred in four different eras, following the shifting nature of the global economy: increased focus on agriculture (around 1850); shift to manufacturing and the Industrial Revolution (1850–1920); movement to services and people development (1920–1950); and the current era of a "change to a communications and international focus" (p. 5). Although neglecting to

mention it directly, Harcleroad & Ostar (1987) predicted the impact that globalization would have on this sector of higher education, arguing the demand for innovation and research in the global economy has positioned research institutions to focus on knowledge generation, while public regional institutions have been able to focus on student enrollment and teaching (Orphan, 2018b; Fryar, 2015).

One of the most important roles that public regional institutions play is one of access to higher education. In fall 2011, 69% of all undergraduate students attending public four-year universities enrolled in a regional/comprehensive institution (Fryar, 2015). Many students with minoritized racial identities enroll at regional institutions (Orphan, 2018b), with finances playing a key factor in that decision. Some refer to regional institutions as the "backbone of higher education in America" (Fryar, 2015, p. 28), given the access-based missions, lower cost of attendance, and flexibility afforded allowing increased student enrollment, access, and completion rates. How students engage with a public regional institution is generally more transactional, with students frequently transferring in and out as compared to other institutional types (Natalicio, 2007).

As with other institutions of higher education, the faculty contribute to the overall tone and course for the institutional mission, goals, values, and student experience. Harcleroad & Ostar (1987) mentioned the need for faculty to remain at the "forefront" of their fields (p. 2) and emphasized teaching within the public regional environment. This still rings true today but neglects to consider the role of competition and rankings the entire sector experiences and internalizes in different ways. Even with regional institutions serving less of a research role and more of a teaching and access role today,

faculty are stuck between the research university model's demands of publication and other models such as those of liberal arts or community colleges (Henderson & Kane, 1991). Additionally, some faculty have felt pressured to publish as a means of enhancing institutional status at public regional institutions (Henderson, 2011). An additional study found an increase in journal activity and publications among regional/comprehensive university faculty (Henderson & Buchanan, 2007), a nod to the changing landscape of institutional pressures.

Public regional institutions play an important role in community support and economic development (Orphan, 2018a). This community support often takes the form of flexibility and ability to respond to community need, epitomizing the positive aspects of the "town and gown" relationship in higher education. Many civic leaders are graduates of such institutions, with governmental leaders and regional institutions often working in tandem to improve public services and the educational pipeline by educating teachers for the public education system (Orphan, 2018b). This flexibility reflects the institutional ability to promote upward mobility and access to different socioeconomic class levels in a way that is more tangible and effective for the local community (Orphan, 2018b). Finally, public regional institutions "serve as economic hubs with curricula that respond to regional workforce needs" (Orphan, 2018b, para. 7). The important role that these institutions play cannot be understated, and challenges faced by these institutions dominate much of the literature on the sector.

Internationalization at the Public Regional Institution

As the scholarship of public regional institutions continues to evolve, there remains a dearth of literature connecting globalization, internationalization, and the

impact on the public regional sector. The commonly referenced motivators for internationalization stem from an understanding of the research university, discounting the goals, mission, and role public regional institutions play in the higher education sector. This portion of the literature review aims to situate the nature of internationalization with public regional institutions, emphasizing goals and the unique context of such institutions. Highlighting the perception of incongruence between institutional mission and internationalization, this portion concludes by identifying gaps for future research. Ultimately, this section seeks to highlight the common motivators of internationalization within the sector but encourage researchers to begin to understand these within the environment of the public regional institution and the unique pressures faced by institutions within this sector.

Internationalization & Mission Creep at Public Regional Institutions

The concept of mission creep (Bok, 2015) and accusations of public regional institutions engaging in this behavior are common, although arguably misapplied (Orphan, 2020). Fundamentally, mission creep requires higher education to understand its roots and purpose in the broader scope of society—often at odds with policymakers, fundraisers, and rankings established nationally and worldwide. Mission creep is defined as the desire to improve to the another "level" of institutional status, placing an emphasis on "building larger facilities, new laboratories, emphasizing research, larger libraries, larger faculty salaries, and lower teaching loads" (Bok, 2015, p. 36). Bok also noted that this often leads to an increase in tuition, at direct odds with the purpose and role of the public regional institution.

Albeit "unfortunate from a public interest standpoint and a risky strategy that rarely brings about success" (Bok, 2015, p. 38), mission creep is common in higher education. Regarding rankings, public regional institutions lack the resources and ability to compete in the world-class quest in the same way as research universities. Even so, diversification of revenue streams across multiple ways remains important to public regional institutions, as they rely much more on state support than research institutions. On average, 32% came from state appropriations in 2010 for public regional institutions (Fryar, 2015). Fryar also recognized how money is spent at a public regional comprehensive institution, with over 45% of their budgets going towards teaching and instruction, 11% to academic support, and 10% to student services.

The junction of mission and values related to public regional institutions and internationalization represents an important crossroads of decision-making and analysis. Largely, the question of "does internationalization benefit a public regional institution?" is an important one to answer. Arguably, internationalization represents a means to an end—a practice through which institutions gain access to a new potential funding source without having to sacrifice their affordability and open-access nature. The structure of the system, based in neoliberalism and academic capitalist ideology (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) provides permission for public regional institutions to engage in whatever behavior deemed necessary to ensure viability and connection to mission and values. I introduce the role of the Confucius Institute as a conduit for achieving such a balance later in Chapter 2.

The challenges in examining internationalization and public regional institutions stems from the seemingly juxtaposed nature of these two concepts. The idea of public

regional institutions engaging within the international realm can be explained by the notion of academic capitalism, to be explored later in this chapter. Similarly, international engagement can be criticized through the lens of mission creep and the espoused goals and missions of public regional institutions. The same motivating factors for internationalization—rankings, prestige, revenue diversification, student outcomes, etc.—often credited to research institutions are often applied to the public regional institution with little context and grand assumptions of a desire to compete as a "world class university" (Altbach, 2003, p. 5). While some of these factors may offer explanatory value to the nature of internationalization at public regional institutions, they often neglect the specific challenges and unique components that characterize a public regional institution today.

Diversification of Revenue Streams and Resource Dependency

The relationship of internationalization and the public regional institution begins where globalization and neoliberalism meet. Globalization continues to drive economic interconnectedness and promote internationalization as a means of revenue diversification. For the public regional institution, this presents opportunities and challenges even as the neoliberal economic agenda continues to threaten higher education (Orphan, 2018b). When viewed as an economic argument, public regional institutions bear the brunt of neoliberalism, particularly given their reliance on state appropriations and their structure of services, instruction, and engagement across students, faculty, and staff. This perspective questions if internationalization is either harmful or helpful to the public regional institution, given the idea of globalization and internationalization coming from the neoliberal economic agenda.

Institutional revenue streams have become increasingly more volatile over the last 30 years (Hossler et al., 1997). When revenues decrease, institutions practice pragmatism and explore other options for funding their operations. The international arena provides multiple options for filling this gap, including student recruitment, solicitation of research funding, recruitment of faculty (to bring in additional research funding and prestige), student-level exchange programs, and institutional-corporate partnerships. In the STEM fields, institutions and faculty play important roles in the ability to capitalize on expertise and promote such partnerships. Many of these methods for diversification of revenue, however, apply differently in the context of a public regional institution. Given the more inward nature—to their students and the communities they serve (Orphan, 2018a)— public regional institutions, to engage internationally, must do so in a way that is in line with their missions while also filling a need for revenue diversification.

Both positive and negative externalities exist in the ongoing quest for a diversification of funds in higher education. As researchers consider the further social stratification across societies, many countries recognize the role that an increased quest for rankings and approach to internationalization may be a cause of further stratification and not just a symptom. Marginson (2016) noted that focusing on the diversification of revenue streams in higher education enhances inter-university competition. This competition, in turn, further contributes to the stratification of higher education, placing a greater focus on the lack of access to many of the institutions engaging in such activities globally. Keeping this in mind, public regional institutions, if choosing to engage globally, likely choose to do so in ways that create those positive externalities without increasing stratification or closing access in line with their respective missions.

State-level funding of higher education continues to be a challenge for policymakers and institutions alike, with the costs of operating a university continuing to increase (Ehrenberg, 2020) and many governing boards wishing to place a moratorium on raising tuition and fees. Coupled with the number of students enrolling at public regional institutions using forms of financial support (i.e., Pell Grants) (Koh et al., 2019), many institutions find themselves constantly working to close revenue gaps where state appropriations and tuition dollars fail to meet the overhead costs of maintaining a functioning university. In times of budgetary challenges, public regional institutions often receive the largest and first round of cuts in state-level appropriations (Chakraborty, 2009). Yet while revenue diversification may tell part of the story, it leaves more to be understood and speaks to the larger gap in the literature within internationalization of higher education work.

Faculty, Internationalization, and the Public Regional Institution

As previously mentioned, faculty began higher education's journey into internationalization due to their ability to engage in the global knowledge economy throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Research is one of the main reasons why institutions are global in scope (Altbach, 2003), highlighting the international nature of research, knowledge creation, and economic development. In the environment of a public regional institution, the role of the faculty member is different. With different scopes and priorities, the pressure for research and publication may be lesser at these institutions, cultivating an environment where the faculty role may be more bundled (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015) and serving in multiple capacities to support the institutional mission.

The nature of the faculty role at the public regional institution, however, remains significantly different given the purpose of the institutions in which they serve. Orphan & Broom (2021) studied faculty life at public regional institutions, finding that faculty within their study derived purpose and value through connection to the broad mission of their employer. Even with a connection to mission, the pressures of faculty life exist. Public regional institutions increasingly pressure their faculty to publish as a means of enhancing institutional status (Henderson, 2011), with publication rates increasing but still far lower than research universities. Returning to the notion of unbundling the faculty role (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015), faculty are more likely to be bundled at a public regional institution, serving in multiple roles—both officially and unofficially—to support the mission of the institution. The pressures for international engagement with faculty are seemingly lesser at a public regional institution, with less emphasis on study abroad programs, global research collaborations, and the commodification of knowledge. However, faculty play an increasingly important role in internationalization within higher education writ large, particularly as the embrace of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) tightened.

To fully understand globalization and international activity in higher education, increased research honoring the nature of regional institutions must be undertaken. This section highlighted the differences in scope, mission, and role of the public regional institution in the U.S. Such differences also call into question the heavy reliance on research universities in the internationalization literature. While certain elements of internationalization apply to the context of the regional institution, this section exposed the gap which exists between an understanding of internationalization and the mission-

focused nature of public regional institutions which calls into question the standard approach to contextualizing international activity in higher education. More research centering the context of public regional institutions is needed to understand the motivators, pathways, and overall perceptions of internationalization at the institutional level.

Confucius Institutes

This study examined internationalization at public regional institutions of higher education through the lens of Confucius Institutes. First introduced in 2004, Confucius Institutes are educational partnerships between an educational entity in the United States and a corresponding entity in the People's Republic of China, overseen by a Chinese governmental organization known as Hanban. Confucius Institutes present an interesting unit of analysis within this study for several reasons: (1) Confucius Institutes provide a direct conduit to international activity for public regional institutions with little relative investment and startup cost; (2) Confucius Institutes provide direct access to the recruitment of Chinese international students, the largest share of international students in the United States (IIE, 2020); and (3) creation of international partnerships and diversified revenue streams.

While scholarship exists related to the goals and role of Confucius Institutes, their nature and inner workings remain shrouded in secrecy. The scholarship offers two main areas of study related to Confucius Institutes—studies in political science and international relations examining the nature of soft power and foreign policy through Confucius Institutes, and reports formulated by non-profit or research groups. Many of these reports are partisan in nature, calling for the elimination of Confucius Institutes

from the U.S. educational system, particularly as their scope continues to be revealed and controversies continue to emerge. Coupled with the changing and deteriorating relationship between Washington and Beijing, a once reliable route to internationalization through Confucius Institutes has become a partisan, polarized issue at both the state and federal levels.

In this section, I provide an overview of the context and nature of Confucius Institutes in the U.S., including their goals, mission, and campus-level partnerships. To further illuminate the goals of the Confucius Institute, I situate them within the context of a theoretical understanding known as *soft power* (Nye, 1990, 2004, 2009). Soft power provides a lens to understand the dual purpose of Confucius Institutes as well as highlight the symbiotic relationship between the hosting institution of higher education and the Chinese government with their presence in the United States. Finally, I highlight the challenges and issues with Confucius Institutes in the United States given the recent challenges with the U.S. and China relationship.

Purpose, Growth, and Spread of Confucius Institutes

In late 2004, the first institute in the United States was founded at the University of Maryland, College Park. The network of Confucius Institutes has grown significantly to over 100 at its peak (Ying, 2016), with numbers declining as result of geopolitical challenges and reputational issues in the United States (Yuan, Guo, & Zhu, 2016). These programs operate independently, like other governmentally related educational outreach programs in the United Kingdom, France, Italy, or Germany. Confucius Institutes operate directly on a college or university campus in the U.S. Confucius Institutes are located across the U.S. in varied settings of institutional types, locations, and classifications.

The purpose of the Confucius Institute is to promote Chinese language and culture outside of China to non-Chinese audiences (Hartig, 2015). This goal often manifests in the form of teaching Chinese language, facilitating cultural exchange programs, and offering cultural programming to the university and local community through the hosting institution (Zhao & Huang, 2010). An understanding of these goals necessitates an analysis of the geopolitical context during which Confucius Institutes began. As higher education's focus on internationalization is a response to globalization worldwide, Confucius Institutes also serve as a response to the same perspectives of globalization. The introduction of the Confucius Institute is a result of the direct interconnection of economies across the Eastern and Western world. The rise and change of China's economic power were catalysts for other nations viewing the increasing value of Chinese language and culture (Zhao & Huang, 2010). Even with the educational mission of the Confucius Institute, they also serve as a cultural diplomacy tool (Hoare-Vance, 2009), financial tool (Lien & Co, 2013), and a representation of China's rising place in the world order (Siow & Wey, 2011).

Competing perspectives of function and purpose create complexity for Confucius Institutes. From the Chinese perspective, Confucius Institutes, as indicated in their mission, serve a cultural diplomacy role (Hubbert, 2014) while also directly contributing to the Chinese mission of establishing soft power worldwide (Nye, 1990, 2004, 2009). Prior to the challenges facing the U.S. and Chinese political relationship post-2016, the Confucius Institute played an important role in softening China's image in the modern Western world. This focus on cultural elements, language learning, and connecting the Confucius Institute into a world experiencing rapid effects of globalization and economic

interconnectedness offered opportunity for Chinese growth and diplomacy. The growth and expansion of Confucius Institutes follows the path of globalization worldwide, with expansion taking place strategically in the United States and within 108 other countries (Hartig, 2012) with important economic and political interests for China.

The importance of rankings and value of American higher education must be considered in the context of internationalization. The "ivory tower" mentality for those in the United States often conjures images of the world class university (Altbach, 2003). For those outside of the U.S. context, the "ivory tower" often represents the entire sector. Having the ability and access to not only influence the higher education sector but also be an active part with institutes housed on U.S.-based campuses met many goals of soft power. Because Confucius Institutes began opening at a time of globalization met with financial downturn in the United States, an attitude of ambivalence originally met their establishment (Wang & Adamson, 2015). They allow for a mutually beneficial relationship to blossom under the guise of economic development prior to the shifting nature of the U.S. and China in the 2010s. This relationship permitted access to Chinese students as a recruitment tool (Peterson, 2017) and showcased increased international activity, both viable options for revenue diversification in an era of financial challenge.

Beyond the receipt of foreign funding, the structure of the Confucius Institute and its links to the Chinese government often are points of contention and challenge for policymakers and university officials. Across multiple countries and in different settings, Confucius Institutes have moved from a stage of "continuous expansion to implicit development" (Ying, 2016, pg. 391). With this movement into implicit development comes the question of not only what Confucius Institutes do, but how they do it related to

their curriculum, methods, and training. Undoubtedly, the concerns of Confucius Institutes in the United States are a direct corollary to many of the other cultural issues between the U.S. and China. However, these institutes and their partnerships often invite critics with issues surrounding academic freedom and Confucius Institutes acting as covert agents with ulterior motives achieved by gaining access to the U.S. higher education sector (Switzer, 2019).

The nature of the relationship between U.S. institutions of higher education and Confucius Institutes is mysterious at best. Based on the secretive nature of the establishment of the Institutes, little is publicly and/or empirically available to understand the process of when and how an Institute begins in the United States. There are close financial and political ties of Confucius Institutes to the Chinese government (Whittaker, 2013) with a nearly $1 billion investment into their establishment in the United States (Switzer, 2019). In examining the initial research questions related to the nature of the relationship between the Institutes and the hosting institution in the United States, all publicly available information indicates that the hosting institution approaches the conception of a Confucius Institute, begging the question of institutional motivations, particularly at public regional institutions of higher education. Regardless of motivators, the beneficial relationship for both parties speaks to what many perceive as the unspoken goal of Confucius Institutes—geopolitical influence through soft power.

Soft Power and The Confucius Institute as an Agent of Foreign Policy

Widely viewed as tools of advancing a foreign policy agenda, scholars often cite the espoused purpose of the Institutes in reference to the larger tool of geopolitical influence which many argue they play. Influences like Confucius Institutes within a

broader foreign policy agenda are known as *soft power* (Nye, 1990, 2004, 2009), a theoretical concept within political science and international affairs seeking to explain how actors within the global political system achieve their goals. In the context of the relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China, soft power effectively contextualizes this challenging, nuanced relationship. The shift to soft power means that the vehicles by which power moved from the battlefield to the court of public opinion and media. The increase of globalization contributed to a diminished desire to exercise hard power, particularly as economies continually grew together and increasingly dependent on each other for overall worldwide financial stability.

Soft power operates in a variety of ways depending on the sector, issue, and actors involved, but applies to industries and relationships across the globe. Even with its controversies in application, a few scholars all reference the presence of Confucius Institutes in the United States as an exemplar of Chinese soft power. Soft power is omnipresent in Chinese media, representing one of the cornerstones of governmental foreign affairs strategy (Mingjiang, 2008). Higher education as a sector represents a major way in which soft power is exercised, as the changing nature of global politics have raised the value of soft power within the global sphere (Gallarotti, 2011). The combination of globalization connecting economies, Chinese desire to exercise soft power, American institutions looking to diversity revenue streams, and increasing power of the United States' higher education sector created a perfect opportunity for Confucius Institutes as a vehicle by which soft power is exerted. In the context of higher education, China recognizes the role that higher education plays in not only the projection of soft power, but also the way in which Confucius Institutes serve as "China's most

systematically planned soft power policy" (Yang, 2010, p. 235), both with the United States and with other valuable economic powers worldwide.

Logistics of Confucius Institutes in U.S. Higher Education

The logistics of establishing a Confucius Institute are kept confidential and often bound by legal agreements preventing public disclosure. A 2017 report, *Outsourced to China*, is one of the most thorough documents outlining the inner workings of Confucius Institutes in the United States. Sponsored by the National Association of Scholars, *Outsourced to China* calls for institutions to cease relationships with China through Confucius Institutes on campuses in the United States. Widely viewed as politically reactionary and socially conservative, the National Association of Scholars seeks to research and educate the public about "policies and legislation that would preserve the liberal arts and protect academic freedom" (para. 1.). They also promote a longstanding interest in academic freedom in U.S. higher education, championing the role that academic freedom plays in ensuring the prevalence of liberal arts and the power of the American university. Some scholars reference NAS being a part of a "neoconservative network" that poses threats to academic freedom with their campaigns against political correctness (Burris & Diamond, 1991). This context is important to bear in mind with NAS' approach to studying and analyzing Confucius Institutes which often is negative and calls for their removal from the U.S. higher education sector altogether.

The Hanban, Institutional Relationships, Staffing, & Finance

Regardless of location, all Confucius Institutes are overseen and controlled by an organization known as the Hanban. Made up of staff affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education, this group leads China's overseas education efforts, which have morphed of

late into a group predominantly focused on Confucius Institutes. Although the Ministry of Education refers to the Hanban as an "affiliated association" (Peterson, 2017, p. 21), most scholars cite the Hanban as a direct agent of the Chinese Ministry of Education. The Hanban Association is comprised of leaders within the Chinese government and includes representatives from other strategic agencies within the Chinese government, including the State Press and Publications Administration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Peterson, 2017).

One of the main roles of the Hanban is to appoint directors and staffing to the Confucius Institutes in other countries in line with the selection processes for other high-ranking education officials within Chinese education. A 2020 update to Peterson's original work noted that the Hanban recently renamed itself to the "Ministry of Education Center for Learning Exchange and Cooperation" (Peterson, 2020). Under this umbrella lives the new "Chinese International Education Foundation" overseeing the day-to-day work of Confucius Institutes. However, the result of these changes is minimal at best (Peterson, 2020) given the nature of government oversight in the People's Republic of China. When considering staffing, the larger perception across the U.S. is Confucius Institute staff members have ulterior motives while in the United States. A recent study by the Stanford Center on China's Economy and Institutions found that nuance with Confucius Institutes is key, recognizing that while the staff of Confucius Institutes often follow the Chinese Communist party line, they are not forced to adopt specific positions of Chinese politics, nor are closely monitored while in the U.S (Stanford University, 2022). This study further complicates the narrative of understanding with Confucius

Institutes in the U.S. and provides little clarity on their overall purpose and trustworthiness.

Each Confucius Institute—higher education partnership in the U.S. is its own separate venture, with the two parties signing a contract to establish the Confucius Institute within the United States. (Peterson, 2017). These contracts generally exist for five years, and can be extended, re-negotiated, or terminated at their conclusion. The extent to which jurisdiction and control over the Institute varies based on the institution, with authority delegated to both parties of the agreement. On average, the Hanban provides approximately $100,000 annually in funding for textbooks, operating supplies, and to cover payroll costs for the Chinese director. These funds are meant to be matched by the host institution and generally are in the form of in-kind support for the Institute (Peterson, 2017). Commonly, the Institutes are stand-alone within the University context, often reporting to the provost; however, some are located within specific academic departments. Much of the decision-making related to the Confucius Institute is made within the context of the agreement and without the approval of any faculty outside of the Institute, including through general faculty governance procedures.

Beyond the internal governance outlined in the contract, each Confucius Institute's work is guided and overseen by an external board of directors. This board also assists in the hiring and appointment of the Chinese co-directors of the Institute. These boards vary in size and have no standard structure (Peterson, 2017). Additional staffing includes administrative staff and American-based staff overseeing various aspects and functions of the Institute, under the supervision of the American and Chinese co-directors. The American-based staff are appointed by the host institution, while the

Chinese staff are appointed by the Hanban, with their salaries and living expenses also supported externally. Importantly, the Chinese staff of the Confucius Institutes are not employees of the host institution but are employed by the Hanban for short-term programs in line with U.S. immigration and work regulations.

The contracting process within the establishment of a Confucius Institute remains a point of contention and criticism. The previous contracts Peterson (2017) analyzed contained several questionable points related to the role of reputation in contract renegotiation or termination. Each contract contained a clause related to actions on behalf of the host institution that "severely harms the image and reputation of the Confucius Institute" (Peterson, 2017, p. 46) would be grounds for immediate termination of the contractual relationship. In addition, contracts also included language related to the legal standing of disagreements and the requirement of following the "Confucius Institute constitution" (Peterson, 2017, p. 48), which alludes to the importance of adherence to Chinese law. These contracts neglected to name a court of jurisdiction should a disagreement occur and not be solved through an arbitration process.

Learning through the Confucius Institute

Culture and language-learning play a critical part in the mission and overall goals and structure of the Confucius Institute. Most of the teaching and learning within the context of the Confucius Institute emphasizes the non-controversial elements of culture. Many of these activities are cultural and open to the public outside of the host institution (Peterson, 2017). Courses offered through the Confucius Institute vary and it depends directly on the host institution if courses are offered for credit. At times, credit-bearing courses have been created by Confucius Institutes without consultation with the host

institution's academic departments. These courses further support the claims of challenges with shared governance and academic freedom and the presence of Confucius Institutes.

The type and scope of courses offered through the Confucius Institute is governed within the terms of the contract as well. Most are related directly to language or other cultural domains, such as music, dance, or food. Courses related to Chinese politics, history, economics, or religion are forbidden (Peterson, 2017). The closest reported example of a controversial course was offered by Rutgers University's Confucius Institute, covering advanced Chinese media. Courses serve as revenue generation mechanisms for the Institute as well as the institution, with both charging fees associated with programs and courses. Such a structure begs an understanding of the niche market of students participating in the offerings of the Confucius Institute. Undoubtedly, involvement varies based on the host institution and its context. Concurrently, Confucius Institutes serve as a cultural haven for Chinese international students outside of the formal roles of Chinese language and cultural exploration.

Criticisms of Confucius Institutes and the Federal China Initiative

The criticisms and challenges facing Confucius Institutes have become louder and more aggressive in recent years as the relationship between China and the United States continues to evolve. At the federal level, policymakers find cause for concern with the motivations and overall goals of Confucius Institutes and frequently malign their interests with those in line with the negative perception of the Chinese government. Beginning in 2020, the United States Department of State designated the non-profit overseeing Confucius Institutes in the United States as a foreign mission, noting Confucius Institutes

are "an entity advancing Beijing's global propaganda and malign influence campaigns on U.S. campuses and K–12 classrooms" (United States Department of State, 2020, para. 2). A recently proposed senate bill would bar colleges with a Confucius Institute from receiving federal funds outside of student financial aid without provisions to ensure academic freedom included within the contractual relationship (Redden, 2021). Many of the criticisms and challenges facing Confucius Institutes came to the forefront during the Trump administration, amid an escalating trade war and geopolitical tensions. While the current narrative remains similar, the polarizing nature of Confucius Institutes and their presence on U.S. campuses links to the larger political narrative of concerns with the Washington-Beijing relationship.

The launch of the United States Department of Justice's *China Initiative* in 2018 further placed strains on the relationship between the U.S. and China while creating several implications for higher education institutions. The premise of the initiative was the "strategic priority of countering Chinese national security threats and reinforces the President's [Trump] overall national security agenda" (United States Department of Justice, 2021) with the underlying premise of protecting American intellectual property. Several high-profile scholars with alleged ties to China were charged with fraud related to their purpose on campuses and in the U.S., including scholars at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Doherty, 2022), University of Kansas (Ruwitch, 2022), and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (Bacallao, 2022).

The China initiative was ended in early 2022 (Lucas, 2022) after a review by the Biden administration in response to criticism from civil rights groups, academics, and other interest groups related to the negative, unanticipated consequences from the

initiative. Accusations of racism, racial profiling, and treating Chinese citizens or Chinese Americans differently based on national origin became commonplace with the initiative. Although the China Initiative is over, in practice, it was launched at a time where Confucius Institutes were already garnering negative limelight. Instead of cooling off tensions, the initiative further raised the stakes and provided a strong backing of federal legitimacy to many of the concerns raised by Members of Congress related to Confucius Institutes.

The Shifting Relationship of Confucius Institutes to Higher Education

As the relationship between the United States and China evolved through three different presidential administrations since 2004, the once rosy picture of Confucius Institutes within higher education in the United States changed. Several challenges arose, including criticisms of infringement on academic freedom (Peterson, 2017), perception of Confucius Institutes as agents of the Chinese government (McCord, 2019), and increased partisanship rhetoric surrounding the economic entanglement of the United States and China (Whittaker, 2013). The result found many institutions of higher education amid a battle of political will and geopolitical chess, unanticipated when many institutions initiated their relationship with Confucius Institutes prior to 2010.

The Confucius Institute developed into a geopolitical challenge for policymakers at both federal and state levels. The rise in Chinese soft power and confusion over the purpose of Confucius Institutes led to incongruencies between intent of the institutes and their purported purpose (Hubbert, 2014). This vacuum of confusion, coupled with strained geopolitical relationships with China, led to an onslaught of negative publicity for China in the U.S. higher education sector. Those critical of Chinese involvement in

U.S. higher education often conflate Confucius Institutes with other negative media reports related to China and higher education, including intellectual property concerns and recent reports of visa fraud (United States Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs, 2020). Inside Higher Education (Redden, 2020) reported that nearly two dozen institutes have closed within the past two years, with recent closures at the University of Missouri and University of Kentucky generating headlines. A new report in 2022 from the National Association of Scholars noted that of the 118 Confucius Institutes in the U.S., over 100 have closed or begun the process of closure as of present (Peterson, Yan, & Oxnevad, 2022).

The purpose here is not to justify the existence or overemphasize the challenges Confucius Institutes face in the United States from both political as well as institutional perspectives, including curricular control, academic freedom, and hiring practices (Peterson, 2017). It is necessary, however, to contextualize how soft power and Confucius Institutes are interconnected to achieve a larger goal. The prevalence of Confucius Institutes in local media, in curriculum and public outreach efforts, and the positive relationships with Beijing via Hanban can benefit the host institution financially and reputationally (Luqiu & McCarthy, 2019). These benefits began as China used Confucius Institutes to promote soft power, taking advantage of growing interconnectedness across economies via globalization (Lo & Pan, 2020). This led to an understanding of the importance of higher education rankings in the United States (Stetar et al., 2010), allowing the Confucius Institute to fill a financial void and be a key to internationalization for various institutions in the United States.

In this study, the Confucius Institute serves as an important and interesting unit of analysis, given their role in providing a direct and relatively easy conduit into internationalization, particularly for public regional institutions. As noted by various internationalization scholars and supported by the conceptual framework, internationalization often contains a financial motivation—those motivations, particularly for public regional institutions of higher education, require further study and additional focus to account for institutional type, context, and specific challenges within the sector. More research is needed to fully understand the possible connection between internationalization, public regional institutions of higher education and the role that Confucius Institutes play in that overall process and goal of international activity.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study comprises two major theories in higher education—academic capitalism and institutional theory. Both approaches require additional contextual elements, including the concepts of neoliberalism and institutional isomorphism to conceptualize internationalization of higher education at public regional institutions. Each theoretical approach scaffolds onto each other; viewing this study in the context of these frameworks in isolation neglects other aspects and circumstances which influence the broader question at hand. Understanding neoliberalism as a foundation for academic capitalism helps set the stage for understanding the external forces directing higher education towards an international perspective, while institution theory and institutional isomorphism offer a framework for understanding the pressures public regional institutions face when operating in an increasingly globalized sector.

Neoliberalism & Academic Capitalism

The foundation of internationalization in higher education stems from the neoliberal approach relating to globalization and competition. Neoliberalism is not unique to higher education; however, its spread through the economic sector has become a rationale by which policymakers justify budget cuts to education and social programs (Saunders, 2010). At its core, neoliberalism places trust in markets as the best method for decision making and ensuring human welfare (Harvey, 2005). The engagement of academic labor in a neoliberal economic system is a driving force behind higher education's desire to maintain a competitive advantage over others (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). The context of neoliberalism in higher education takes on four assumptions, according to Olssen & Peters (2005): a focus on self-interest, an appetite for free-market economics, support of a laissez-faire approach to market regulation, and a belief in free trade (p. 314–315). These assumptions help guide the broader approach higher education takes in its engagement with economics, economic policy, and commodification of higher education.

To understand academic capitalism as a theoretical concept in higher education is to recognize that globalization is the vehicle of neoliberalism at the core of political and economic decisions across sectors (Kandiko, 2010). Academic capitalism seeks to explain how universities engage in the global marketplace. A key theory in higher education to understand institutional behavior, creators Slaughter & Leslie (1997) defined academic capitalism as "institutional and professional market or market-like efforts to secure external moneys" (p. 8). This definition remains intentionally broad, notably due to the constantly changing nature of the economic system in which higher education

operates and decisions are made under the present conditions of the market (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Academic capitalism as a concept requires an analysis of human capital, market-like behaviors, and an understanding of the growth of global markets resulting from globalization.

Many scholars employ this framework to explain countless phenomena in higher education. Following the introduction of academic capitalism in 1997, Slaughter & Rhoades (2004) continued the conversation, most notably recognizing the shift that higher education actively made into academic capitalism as a response to market forces. Academic capitalism requires a focus on the institutions themselves and understand the role that they play in student choice by selling a brand (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Such marketing creates further competition, which follows with increased rankings and academic prestige as universities claim graduates as products of their unique brand (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Viewing the institution from a transactional perspective mirrors that of the marketplace and of globalization, where competition creates an environment of continued stratification, winners, and losers (Slaughter, 2014).

Slaughter & Leslie (1997) and Slaughter & Rhoades (2004) highlighted the wide-ranging impacts of academic capitalism across the macro and micro levels, ranging from the overall system to individual institutional actors. While the implications and impacts vary greatly across disciplinary and institutional type (Mendoza, 2009), academic capitalism often influences approaches to funding allocations; academic programs; faculty work and labor; student recruitment; technology; research and grant funding; human, physical, and financial capital; patents; copyrights; administration; and the commodification of academic functions into the global marketplace (Slaughter & Leslie,

1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). These impacts tie academic capitalism to the neoliberal economic structure, linking higher education to the marketplace through regulation and funding streams (Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014). Secondly, behavioral actions on behalf of policymakers, institutional leaders, faculty, and students all further contribute to the snowballing effect of academic capitalism within higher education (Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014).

Considering the international nature of academic capitalism as a product of neoliberalism rooted in globalization, the interdependent nature of economic markets and institutions necessitates a deeper understanding of how geographic scale impacts decision-making. Academic capitalism, particularly on a global scale, morphed into the concept of transnational academic capitalism, wherein the collaborative efforts between transnational corporations and research universities continued to grow (Kauppinen, 2012). As academic capitalism began blurring boundaries between higher education and market forces, the flow of knowledge across a global medium and the uneven development of transnational economies across global sectors contributed to academic capitalism transcending national boundaries (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Kauppinen, 2012). Particularly as foreign investments in research and development (Kauppinen, 2012) and academic mobility of research, people, and resources (Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014) continued to grow, international higher education may be better understood and contextualized through a transnational lens of academic capitalism.

Academic capitalism is easy to conceptualize with copious examples of institutions engaging in market-like behavior in response to external pressures. However, its impacts and the subsequent externalities—both positive and negative—create an

environment under which institutions face pressure to internationalize and engage in global activity. The tides of the global marketplace led to increasing value placed on global perspectives and international activity among students through student mobility and study abroad as well as faculty with research partnerships and international collaborations. This contributed to an environment characterized by prestige-chasing, accusations of mission creep (Bok, 2015) and rankings amid volatile funding sources resulting from a neoliberal economic approach.

Theoretical Concepts of Institutional Change

Institutional Theory

Higher education is under constant pressure to change, adapt, and evolve, with external pressures, forces, and personalities involved in its structure and governance. Several theoretical perspectives offer understandings of the broad concept of institutional change, often calling into question the importance of mission, values, and roles that higher education plays within society. Institutional theory conceptualizes environments of change and for organizational action and is often utilized in complement to other theoretical approaches and understandings (Dacin et al., 2002). Change in higher education is unique and often moves slowly as motivations are questioned; in addition, institutional culture combined with governance structures present numerous hurdles. While Kezar (2018) offered other theoretical approaches for understanding institutional change, including scientific management, evolutionary, political, social cognition, and cultural theories, the emphasis of institutional theory on "external pressures combined with internal norms" (Kezar, 2018, p. 45) offered the clearest lens by which to conceptualize institutional change related to internationalization.

Understanding higher education as an organizational unit requires an examination of the institution within its context with less emphasis on the behavior of individual actors within the organization (Perrow, 1979). Kezar's approach to institutional theory centers the higher education context and the unique environment in which institutions operate. Her 2018 work emphasized several key factors affecting the institutionalization of change in higher education and ways to conceptualize the challenges and barriers to change. Selected factors Kezar (2018) cited are included below, with a brief explanation of their connections to institutional theory and connection to understanding internationalization as a change agent within higher education.

- **Professional Bureaucracy.** Higher education and its processes, bureaucracy, and politics differ dramatically from those in other industries and markets. Each institution operates in different ways under an umbrella of similarly common values shared across academia. These are often characterized by dual power and authority systems resulting from socialization and training, particularly for faculty and administrators. This bureaucracy, at times, creates challenges in responding to the pressures the system faces, particularly at the juncture of institutional mission and politics at public institutions. Recently, internationalization morphed into a political lightning rod, creating challenges for institutions in responding to market forces while appeasing policymakers for state appropriations at public institutions.

- **Shared Governance.** The system of shared governance, long a hallmark of higher education in the United States, calls for a nature of shared responsibility among the faculty and administration to oversee institutional

affairs, educational offerings, and educational environment for students. Shared governance often meets challenges not only with the bureaucratic nature of higher education, but also with governance structures overseeing institutions—particularly public ones (Kaplan, 2006). Internationalization often rests as a strategy within strategic planning, necessitating agreement across all parties in a shared governance structure to understand, value, and direct an institution's international activity and reach.

- **Governing Boards.** Kezar (2018) recognized the challenges that institutions face in how internal authority and power systems often are external to the institution itself through various governance structures. With an emphasis on public institutions, the governance structure often connects to the state or local political context—meaning decisions made at a governance level may align with a political approach rather than one held by the institution itself. Policymakers often debate the nature of globalization as well as question political and economic ties in the international realm, directly affecting higher education institutions, likely from a financial perspective.

- **Loose Coupling.** Higher education, inherently, is a loosely coupled system (Cameron, 1984), with each academic department making its own decisions within the larger scope of the institution. Loose coupling and internationalization often mean that internationalization occurs in pockets without a larger strategy or ability for the institution to respond effectively to pressures arising from globalization.

- **Organized Anarchy.** One of the main challenges facing higher education is

  the notion of organized anarchy. Decentralization, combined with ambiguity

  of goals and leadership (Kezar, 2018), creates an environment under which

  institutions may find change and response to external pressures occurring

  within a vacuum, or not at all—with little leadership, guidance, or input

  offered from those with perceived decision-making authority.

Institutional theory represents a broad, theoretical approach to understanding

change, considering the unique environment in which higher education institutions

operate within the United States. Kezar argued: "institutional theory examines how

higher education as a social institution might change in different ways from other types of

organizations. The theory also examines the reasons change efforts might be difficult in

long-standing institutions. Lastly, it examines unplanned change or drift" (p. 59). Also

important in understanding institutional theory is the role of both normative and mimetic

pressures within the organization. Normative pressure includes faculty socialization into

their disciplines, while mimetic pressure refers to an institution's ability and likelihood to

resemble another within a similar system—a concept referred to as isomorphism, which I

will analyze later.

Returning to its roots, institutional theory emphasizes how institutions change and

respond to catalytic events, processes, or issues in its environment—or in environments

that directly affect higher education. How institutions respond to change, particularly

related to internationalization, depends heavily on the institutional context itself, the

external forces at play, as well as a focus on the goals, mission, and vision of the

institution within its context (Hearn & McLendon, 2012). Scholars note that some

institutions possess greater capacity to respond to change than others (Hanson, 2001).

Internationalization, as a process, allows for a marketization of higher education, with

institutional theory and institutional isomorphism playing critical roles in the process,

success, and marketization of higher education into an international market (Hemsley-

Brown & Oplatka, 2010). An understanding of this process within the institutional

contexts—both internal and external—is critical to understand how and why institutions

change in response to internationalization pressures.

Institutional Isomorphism

Institutional isomorphism in higher education connects to the premises of

institutional theory and change. Isomorphism is a process of homogenization (DiMaggio

& Powell, 1983, p. 149), under which constraint forces institutions to resemble each other

when faced with similar environmental conditions (Hawley, 1986). Isomorphism takes

several forms, including coercive, mimetic, and normative (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Coercive isomorphism often includes political influences and pressure, mimetic resulting

from "standard responses to uncertainty" (p. 150), and normative referring to the notion

of professionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Kezar, 2018). Regardless of the form

it takes, isomorphism undergirds many of the understandings of institutional theory in

higher education, with the notions of shared governance, bureaucracy, loose coupling,

and organized anarchy all driving institutions to replicate successful responses to

uncertainty.

When considering isomorphism as a theoretical construct, DiMaggio & Powell

(1983) challenged scholars to consider how paradoxical isomorphism really is—rational

actors work to make their organizations increasingly similar while also working to

change them under the context of institutional theory and change. This paradox refers to Weber's notion of the "iron cage" (Scaff, 1987), a sociological concept in which bureaucracy creates a caged environment in which change occurs because of capitalism and an increased rationalization within social structures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Undoubtedly, this iron cage metaphor can be considered from a neoliberal approach, in which higher education institutions operate in a constantly paradoxical environment of institutional goals, values, and missions, while also navigating the ever-widening chasm between funding challenges, the need for change and adaptation, and social value along with those same goals, values, and missions.

Isomorphism often results from pressures that institutions face to take on certain organizational structures and management systems to ensure viability, financial success, legitimacy, and survival (Stensaker & Norgård, 2001). These pressures are predictable, offering organizational theorists an ability to vision how, when, and under what conditions isomorphic behavior may occur (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Organizational level predictors include notions of resource dependency as well as goals, missions, and values. Borrowing from economics, resource dependency (Pfeffer & Salanick, 2003) is a predictor of isomorphism, arguing that the greater dependency an organization has on another, the greater likelihood the dependent organization will mimic its supporter (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The same idea applies with principles and values—the more uncertain an organization's mission, vision, and values are, the more likely they will adapt values like those of an organization they consider an example of success (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Field level predictors refer to the extent that variation, diversity, and variety exist within a system, also noting the role in which financial and

resource support play (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) in isomorphic behavior within the field of a specific system.

Understood within the context of the public regional institution, academic capitalism speaks to the ability to engage in international activity and market-like behaviors as a means for revenue diversification and fiscal solvency. Institutional theory, particularly isomorphism, highlights the movement of public regional institutions to mimic other institutions within the sector while still retaining their unique characteristics and purpose, avoiding accusations of mission creep. The following diagram highlights the various factors influencing internationalization at public regional institutions through the conceptual framework and literature review. The factors of institutional mission, systemic pressures, and economic factors influence each other—i.e., globalization influences a move toward internationalization while requiring a balance between institutional mission and systemic pressures.

Institutional Mission	Systemic Pressures	Economic Factors
Access	*Governance Context*	*Neoliberalism*
Community Service	*Isomorphic Behavior*	*Academic Capitalism*
Mission–Centeredness	*Globalization*	*Revenue Streams*

Specific Institutional Environment

Internationalization at Public Regional Institutions
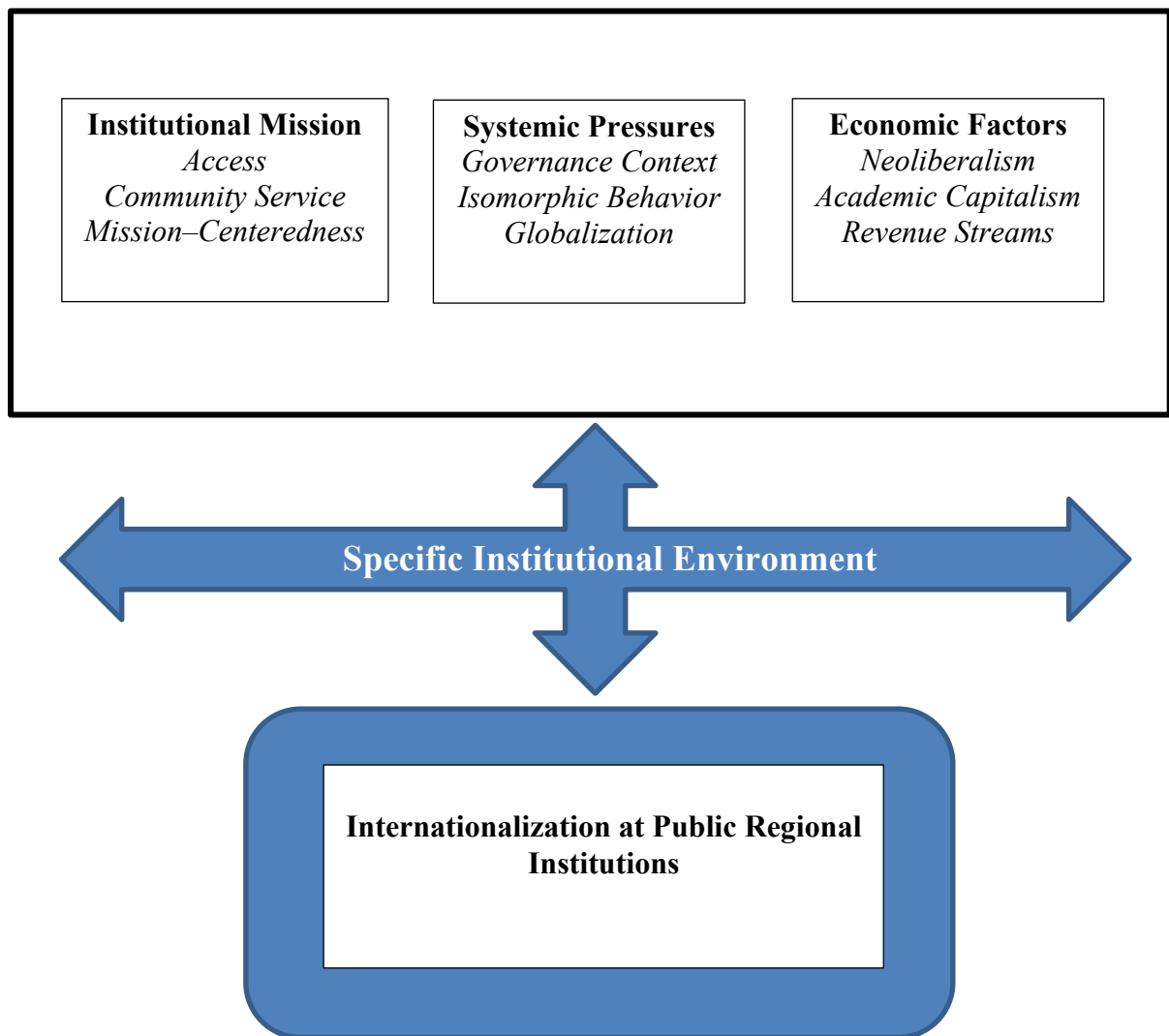
Figure 1. Diagram of Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study encompasses three main components of public regional institutions of higher education and internationalization: institutional mission, systemic pressures, and economic factors. The mission-focused nature of public regional institutions is viewed in context of the systemic pressures of internationalization as referenced by governance context, isomorphic behavior, and the realities of

globalization. Economic factors at play consist of neoliberalism, academic capitalism and market-like behaviors, and the necessity of revenue diversification. As illustrated above, these three distinct factors all influence each other within the context of the institutional environment to determine how, why, and under what conditions specific public regional institutions engage with internationalization.

Conclusion

This chapter began with laying the historical groundwork for understanding international activity in higher education. As globalization continued to permeate across political and economic bounds, the concept of internationalization sought to explain how institutions of higher education adapt to an ever-changing globalized world. Through policy and practice, internationalization often stems from financial desires, a quest for positive rankings, and a desire for institutional reputation and prestige. However, this chapter highlighted the challenges in applying the commonly cited motivators of internationalization to the context of the public regional institution. Introducing Confucius Institutes as a unit of analysis and means through which internationalization takes place, this chapter highlighted the various challenges public regional institutions face at the intersection of internationalization and the presence of a Confucius Institute. Finally, using the theoretical perspectives of academic capitalism and institutional theory, this chapter situated the idea of internationalization in the conceptual realm of economic neoliberalism and institutional change. These approaches further explain how institutions internationalize and the economic and isomorphic pressures therein.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study explored internationalization within public regional institutions of higher education in the United States (U.S.) through the perspective of Confucius Institutes— Chinese language and cultural learning centers in partnership with the government of the People's Republic of China (Hartig, 2012; Peterson, 2017). Guided by three main research questions and in the tradition of qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2003), the goals of this study were two-pronged: (1) to understand the phenomena of internationalization at public regional institutions, and (2) to understand the context of the Confucius Institute as a component of international activity at such institutions. Honoring that institutional and local context is imperative contextual information for the case site, this study employed case study methodology to elicit a rich, thick description of the phenomena (Merriam, 1998) through the following research questions:

1. In what ways do leaders of public regional institutions define and understand internationalization?

2. How do leaders of public regional institutions describe the nature and purpose of Confucius Institutes?

3. What political, social, and economic influences shape a public regional institution's decision-making related to Confucius Institutes?

These research questions allowed for a scaffolded approach to understanding the complexity and unique nature of internationalization at public regional institutions. Beginning with understanding how institutional leaders conceptualize internationalization amid the other priorities and responsibilities of a public regional institution, this set the framework for how Confucius Institutes can be understood, interpreted, and viewed within the campus environment. The single-site design allowed for a rich understanding of the specific case, also honoring the recent challenges and drastic decline in Confucius Institutes present at public regional institutions in recent years.

Study Design

This study employed a single-site case study approach to understand the research questions. Generally, a case study is a holistic view, description, and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit (Merriam, 1998). More specifically, Gerring (2007) referred to a case study approach as understanding a single unit to contextualize a larger class of similar units. The focus of case study research rests on process, understanding, and interpretation (Merriam, 1998) to illuminate on the "nuance and wholeness" (Stake, 1995, p. 19) of the phenomena at hand. Within a case study, methodological decisions stem from the varied epistemological beliefs of the researcher (Yazan, 2015); these decisions often include the bounds of the case(s) for study, data collection methods, and decision to employ quantitative data.

Single Site Design & Case Bounding

The case is a public regional institution with a Confucius Institute present on its campus. The single-site approach allows for a deep contextual understanding of the institution and its relationship with the Confucius Institute and internationalization, more

broadly. The characteristics of public regional institutions as identified by the literature review and the context of internationalization of higher education in the U.S. form the environment in which this case operates—the fence that "fences in" the bounds of the case (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). The bounding of the case was informed by three major criteria: (1) the literature review and what is understood, broadly, about internationalization of higher education in the United States; (2) the conceptual framework; and (3) availability of possible case sites.

This bounded system guided the approach of this study to understand the relationship between the case site, Confucius Institute, and the broader context of internationalization within the larger case. The factors surrounding internationalization at public regional institutions were already murky, as much of the literature and understanding of the phenomena has applied the definitions, motivations, and understandings of internationalization at research universities to the context of public regional institutions. The single site design allowed for a deeper understanding of the context within the specific case and how the relationship of the institution, its people, its values, and its mission connect with the broader approach and understanding of internationalization. In addition, the single site design and bounds within this case allowed for a thorough understanding of the relationship the host site had with the local community as well as local, state, and federal level policymakers given the political complexities of Confucius Institutes.

Case Selection

There were several factors considered when selecting a site for this study as well as several challenges in overall site selection. The number of Confucius Institutes has

decreased significantly in the last few years, given the political context and results of increased strain in U.S.-China relations. This context required for a light touch and reassurances of anonymity for the participating site. The first stage of site selection involved identifying, through the database maintained by the National Association of Scholars (2021), the location of Confucius Institutes in the United States. I took this list and classified each higher education institution into three main categories: research universities, public regional universities, or community colleges. I removed any private institutions from this list given the parameters of the research questions.

Upon completion of this process, only a few potential sites remained from this database. I then conducted independent research on each of these remaining sites and found that most sites either had begun the process of closing their Confucius Institute or had removed any mention of it from their institutional website. With the remaining sites, I reached out to both and ultimately made connection with the host site that participated in the research. I ensured that the case site did not carry any additional institutional designations such as a historically Black college or university, or a minority-serving institution. Finally, I confirmed the case site is an independent campus and not classified as a satellite campus for a larger research university.

While not a key component as a part of case selection, I kept a secondary eye on the role that rurality may play in the overall context of internationalization and presence of the Confucius Institute. Confucius Institutes offer programming and courses for both students as well as community members (Peterson, 2017). Rurality adds an additional layer of complexity and intrigue within the research questions for understanding internationalization, particularly in rural areas with an enrolled international population.

Many Confucius Institutes are hosted by institutions in non-metropolitan areas where the appeal for international activity and international student enrollment may be less obvious. Rurality and location are important components for international students in decision making, with many preferring larger cities for a greater prosect of employment post-graduation (Musumba, Jin, & Mjelde, 2011). As such, rurality is an important consideration and factor that came up often during interviews and document analysis.

Data

There were three major sources of data for this case: interview transcripts, documents, and observations. Following the exempt determination of the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB), I sent the exempt documentation (Appendix A) to the host site for their IRB's approval. I then worked with the host site contact to determine the list of participants to interview. I created a list of potential participants and we worked collectively to identify additional possible participants using their context and expertise related to the phenomena. The host site contact made an initial email introduction on my behalf to each possible participant, and I then followed up with the approved recruitment letter (Appendix B) outlining the context of the study. The host site contact's administrative support staff member assisted in the scheduling and confirmation of interviews. With the support of the host site contact and their administrative support, I spent one week on site during April 2022 conducting interviews and observations. In addition, prior to the site visit, I collected over 30 publicly available documents to orient myself to the context of the case. Finally, I was able to spend additional time in observation of the institution and its context.

Interviews

Interviews followed a semi-structured approach (Merriam, 1998) and followed a general template with adjustments made related to the positionality of each participant and their respective area(s) of oversight on campus. I also created a general interview protocol with standard questions which was adapted for additional identified participants through snowball sampling. The questions were open-ended and asked participants to reflect on their understanding and perspective of three key areas: internationalization, the Confucius Institute, and connections between these two areas. Each of the participants had a connection with the host site, with most being affiliated as faculty or staff. There were four participants who were affiliated by means of their employment or student status within the local community. Each interview conducted is identified within the table below by participation type/role. In total, I conducted 19 interviews (16 in person and three virtually, via Zoom) with over 1,000 recorded minutes of interview data; each interview, on average, lasted 45 minutes. An example protocol is included as Appendix C.

Table 1

Participant Table

Case	Participant Type/Role	Quantity
American Regional University	Cabinet-level institutional leader	6
American Regional University	Staff members	6
American Regional University	Faculty, former faculty	4
American Regional University	Community members	2
American Regional University	Students	1

In-person interviews were audio recorded (Appendix D) and virtual interviews via Zoom (Appendix E) were audio and video recorded with the informed consent of the participant. Interviews were then transcribed using NVIVO qualitative analysis software and then edited for accuracy to create final interview transcripts. All recordings were retained within a private, encrypted folder within a secure drive and then deleted following the conclusion of this study. To protect the identity of the institution and the participants, both were assigned pseudonyms, and participants will only be referred to in a general sense, grouped into five main categories: cabinet-level institutional leaders, staff members, faculty or former faculty, community members, and students.

Documents

Several kinds of documents were included as a part of analysis and for the purposes of data triangulation (Bowen, 2009). Prior to interviews and the site visit, I collected over 30 publicly available documents related to the case site, including strategic planning meeting minutes, the Confucius Institute webpage (and its archives), meeting minutes from the institution's governing board meetings, documents related to internationalization and planning, institutional fact books and institutional research analyses, the signed Confucius Institute agreement with the Hanban and Chinese partner institution, and multiple sources of news coverage, both at the local and state level, related to the Confucius Institute. These documents assisted in refining interview protocols and structuring broad-level themes and questions for participants. Many of these documents were resourceful in triangulating data points collected through both interviews and observations during the visit to the host site.

Beyond publicly available documents related to the case, I kept several types of internal memos, reflection documents, and notes to add further context and validity to the findings. Prior to interviews, I created a template document in which to keep interview notes, reflections, and key takeaways and completed this document following each interview, incorporating hand-written notes and important observations noted during the interview setting. These documents helped pinpoint specific areas of connection across participant interviews and helped in refining interview protocols for subsequent days' conversations. While coding and analyzing interview transcript, document, and observational data, I kept a detailed, audited account of the data collection and analysis process to ensure that established codes are independent and not influenced by my own positionality within the coding and analysis process.

Observations

As a broad term, observations may include the physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, conversations, subtle factors (including non-verbal communication), and your own behavior as a researcher (Merriam, 1998; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Borg & Gall, 1989; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Patton, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). As a part of observations, I spent five days working from the host site, observing the physical space, interactions among students, and interactions among faculty and staff within the scope of my research. I was also able to tour, observe, and gain context to the physical space of the Confucius Institute and its connection to campus and the local community. Finally, I spent time observing the relationship of the campus to the local community, seeking to understand the role that rurality and local cultural values played in contextualizing this relationship (Sanders, 1981).

Analysis

Throughout data analysis, I relied on the literature review and conceptual framework to inform my perspective surrounding the broader perspective of the case (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Using information gathered from the literature review and conceptual framework, I deductively created an a priori list of codes (Saldaña, 2013; Saldaña & Omasta, 2016) prior to data collection. As the analytical process began, this list was then updated, expanded, and refined inductively through fundings uncovered through interviews. Given the scholarship broadly lacks any connection point to internationalization for public regional institutions, relying heavily on research universities, I took a flexible and open-minded approach to analysis. The literature review and conceptual framework were guides to approach data collection, but analysis required a level of flexibility and adaptation to allow themes uncovered through interviews to come to light. Codes were developed at broader, topical levels, with sub-codes established a priori as well as through the process of analysis. In addition to using NVIVO qualitative analysis software for transcription of interview recordings, I also used NVIVO for coding, analysis, and keeping audit trail memos when analyzing each transcription. This software allowed for determining the aggregate use of each code and provided data visualization tools for illuminating the presence and potency of each code across interviews. A full list of codes is included as Appendix F.

Trustworthiness, Validity, and Reliability

This study incorporated several techniques to ensure trustworthiness, validity, and reliability. I incorporated triangulation, peer examination, and disclosure of researcher bias to ensure both internal validity and reliability as well as confirmability (Merriam,

1998). Triangulation in this study was done by including varied data sources (interviews, observations, and document analysis) to confirm findings. Peer examination occurred through keeping a detailed audit of all coding and data analysis processes. Researcher positionality will also be included as an element of ensuring internal validity and reliability, as will peer examination of the coding scheme and analytical process. Beyond triangulation, reliability (Merriam, 1998) will be ensured through positionality and reflection throughout the data collection and analysis process. While the goal of this study and case study research in general is not statistical generalizability, ensuring external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988) assures research conditions support findings could be applied to other situations within a similar case. Sampling and a reliance on thick description are key components of external validity and will be ensured throughout case selection.

In line with the traditions of qualitative inquiry, I also ensured credibility, transferability, and dependability within this study (Connelly, 2016; Amankwaa, 2016). Transferability was enhanced through the thick description and analysis afforded by the case study methodology (Merriam, 1998). As the context of the case changed in the data collection process, I took note of such changes and how they influenced my data collection and analysis to promote dependability. Finally, I incorporated feedback on the interview protocols, data collection process, data analysis, and conclusions with the assistance of the dissertation committee guiding this study.

Reflexivity and Limitations

As a component of ensuring trustworthiness, I recognize my potential for bias as well as assumptions and world views related to the research questions and phenomena

included within this study. I am a former international educator and identify as a globalist, viewing the interconnected nature of people, places, and cultures as a net positive. Additionally, I believe in the ability of higher education to create environments where learning about the perspectives and cultures of others is encouraged. I have worked with international education for much of my career and am also actively engaged in activities that promote internationalization, intercultural competence, and global citizenship as important competencies of a collegiate experience. I plan to counteract my own perceptions and possible biases as a researcher through the components and actions listed to ensure trustworthiness, validity, and reliability. It is also important to note that this study has no agenda, subconsciously or otherwise, to comment on the validity or presence of Confucius Institutes within the United States, nor make any sort of judgment on the nature of the relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

The major limitation of this study is its design. The findings of a single-site case study are not meant to be generalizable and may not be applicable to all public regional institutions and their respective approaches to internationalization. Although the nature of case study research places less emphasis on generalizability across multiple cases, this is still a limitation of this study. Another limitation is the anonymity of the host site and the fact that all of those interviewed within this study are affiliated, either as employees or alumni, of ARU. There are several contextual components related to the community as well as local and state context that shed light onto the overall case; including these would be a breach of trust and directly identify the institution. Lastly, there are also additional considerations with the Confucius Institute in this specific case that provide detail and

context to the case but would also directly identify the host site if identified throughout

the findings.

CHAPTER 4

CASE FINDINGS

This chapter describes the case findings at American Regional University (ARU), a pseudonym for the selected case in this study. Over the course data collection, I conducted 16 in-person interviews with various campus and community members, with three interviews taking place virtually via Zoom. I then draw on findings from these interviews as well as document analyses and observations to create a thick description of the case site (Merriam, 1998). I begin Chapter 4 with a description of the background and historical context of American Regional University as well as the Confucius Institute within this case site. Next, I group my case findings into three major areas: institutional attributes and features, the sociopolitical context, and the local and community environment, the major themes which arose through data analysis. Through these areas, I highlight what internationalization is and how it is understood within the context of ARU, the understanding and purpose of the Confucius Institute, state-level political factors which encourage internationalization indirectly, and the disconnection of national discourse on Confucius Institutes with the experience at ARU. I end this chapter with a culmination of these findings and revisiting the connection to the overall research questions guiding this study.

Background and Historical Context of American Regional University

American Regional University is a public regional institution of higher education in the United States. ARU is in a rural area, approximately two hours from the most

proximate metropolitan area. Because of its location, ARU provides a major access point to higher education in its area; a strong relationship with the local counties and ARU provides a pathway for students to enroll in higher education after high school. However, there are less than 10,000 students currently enrolled in the local county school district across kindergarten through grade 12. Given its rural location and small population, ARU relies on neighboring states for recruitment of out-of-state students; the greatest growth for ARU has come from its online degree offerings founded in recent years. According to data from the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS), there are fewer than 15,000 students enrolled at ARU, and the institution is classified as a masters' institution by Carnegie Classification. Within the student population, nearly three-quarters identify as white, with fewer than ten percent each of Black, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino students. Almost one-quarter of students are age 25 or older. The students that ARU serves are varied in terms of socioeconomic background, race, and age, among other groups, and the institution recognizes the need to adapt and serve students across multiple identity groups and experiences as a regional institution.

Since its founding, ARU has served as a pillar and beacon of growth and change in its rural location, working with the community to serve the local area and its citizens. Historically, the relationship between ARU and the local community is one of symbiotic support and progress; much like many town-gown relationships, one would suffer or look differently without the support of the other. At its founding, ARU was built by many of the residents in the area and was supported not only financially but also with labor, capital, and vision to bring ARU to fruition. This sense of dedication and mutual interconnectedness has passed through generations, with many current employees or local

residents having familial connections in the area to the founding of ARU. This historical connection of ARU to its community is one that runs deep, with this history still informing decision-making and driving community participation with ARU. A cabinet-level administrator described this relationship in this way:

> I think we are inextricably combined, and we always will be, and we always have been. This community founded this university because [community members], knowing that they would never use the school—but their grandkids would, people from outside the region would—they had the vision for that. But because they sacrificed, and they mortgaged homes and they mortgaged their cattle, and they did whatever they could to build this school up. They feel a deep sense of ownership. But it's not a normal college town where the college is siloed.

This relationship between ARU and the community is one that lead some scholars to identify what is referred to as an "anchor institution" (Harris & Holley, 2016; Birch, Perry, & Taylor, 2013). Higher education institutions that can be classified as an anchor institution are commonly defined by their ability to make rural locations more urban, contributing to a more "urban majority" in the United States (Birch, Perry, & Taylor, 2013). Anchor institutions are notable in their role in local economic development and how the presence of a higher education institution creates further opportunities for the community in which it is located (Harris & Holley, 2016). Although the concept of anchor institutions was introduced long after ARU's founding, the institution has undoubtedly been an economic driver for the area, thanks in large part to the community's belief in the value and purpose of its presence.

There are also other key social and cultural factors which define the case and the area in which it occupies. First, the economy of the community is predominately tourism-based, with the town drawing visitors from around the world for local attractions. This reliance on a tourism-based economy created an environment of understanding and acceptance of people from other backgrounds and cultures, bringing a note of diversity into a community that otherwise is somewhat homogeneous. Next, many of the dominant cultural values of the areas stemming from a shared sociocultural perspective adds another layer of importance to the value of other cultures and perspectives. An institutional leader described ARU as a "uniting force through education" bringing the community, local citizens, and cultural context together:

> I think that the relationship between us and community members continues to be that one of reciprocity and belief that when we invest in the university and when we invest in education, we bring opportunity to our town. I think the community is one to champion the university and to celebrate opportunity. And it's a very unique setting in that we are a tourist town, and we see millions of tourists pass through our town [every year] …. And I think that one thing that [ARU] does truly is provide a common ground for all of these unique cultures to cultivate around. [We] work really hard to provide learning opportunities for all. All of those communities are subsets of our community. And I think, yes, you see [ARU's] role as being a uniting force through education.

The context of this case is crucial in creating a thick description (Merriam, 1998, 1988) to understand the context and nuance of its environment. At ARU, several aspects of institutional and local culture created an environment under which internationalization,

particularly student mobility, was able to thrive and succeed. The relationship between ARU and its local community was another asset, with the historical context creating a relationship of mutual trust and avoiding the negative stereotype that can accompany town-gown relationships. I also spent time learning about the role and purpose of the Confucius Institute at ARU, as well as its historical progression and background to be an important part of the campus and local community today.

The Confucius Institute at American Regional University

The Confucius Institute at ARU has been on campus for several years, spanning presidential administrations and leadership changes within the campus context. Sitting on an edge of campus near other main university buildings, the Confucius Institute has its own building along a major thoroughfare through campus. While I was on campus, I noted the busy street on which the Confucius Institute was located, a main road which connects two ends of campus and the city. Much of the traffic, both vehicular and people, seemed to be moving by the Confucius Institute to access the nearby parking lots, residence halls, or other university buildings across the street. Although I never saw students, faculty, or staff enter the Confucius Institute while on campus, it was in a highly visible and active area, with signage in both English and Mandarin informing passers-by of what the building contained.

At the Confucius Institute, I was greeted by a freestanding building that contained staff offices, meeting space, and areas for communal gathering and programming. The library within the Confucius Institute was one of its highlights and major assets, with several shelves stocked full of books and resources on Chinese language and culture. It was clear through the presence of its own building and the resources located within the

Confucius Institute that this has been an institutional priority, given its proximate location

on campus and resources within the building. Even as a clearly well-supported entity

within the campus ecosystem, there existed a clear juxtaposition between this support and

the reality I experienced—the Confucius Institute was quiet, with minimal activity during

my visit. It was almost as if the Institute itself was a visual representation of the

challenges facing Confucius Institutes overall in the U.S. today, a stark reminder of the

changing nature of international relationships and diplomacy with China.

The Confucius Institute at ARU was developed through a partnership with the

Hanban association in China in line with other Confucius Institutes in the United States.

At the time of the establishment of the Confucius Institute at ARU, a staff member noted

that it was widely considered an accomplishment to have a Confucius Institute on

campus. This participant referenced other research institutions, such as Stanford

University in California, as other locations of Confucius Institutes and spoke with

excitement about having one established at a public regional institution like ARU. This

accomplishment was exciting for ARU as one of the first public regional institutions to

gain a Confucius Institute and have something that was considered mainly available to

research institutions. Another staff member described the process and journey of

establishing a Confucius Institute at ARU in this manner:

> I don't recall now what was the initial motivator. I worked with our professor on
>
> campus [from China] and our partner university, and we applied to be a Confucius
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> Institute host. We were denied in [year] in that application. The motivating factor
>
> back then, and if I recall correctly, is that we were we were trying to foresee the
>
> way business and things were trending toward. We knew it would be very helpful

for our students to have the opportunity to learn Mandarin Chinese. And the

Confucius Institute was a way to help. The funds needed to have a professor and

to begin to build a Chinese language program—I think that was that was probably

the initial motivator. And I have to say that the building of a Chinese language

program here started before I was in my position, so it was kind of like I inherited

this [application process and program].

The desire to establish a Confucius Institute at ARU was borne of two main motivators:

interest from institutional leadership, motivated by the idea of increased international

activity, and understanding the value it would have towards the student experience on

campus. A byproduct of the Confucius Institute was their reputation at the time of its

establishment at ARU and the benefits associated with the presence of a Confucius

Institute, particularly having something that was generally reserved for research

institutions. A staff member described the application process similarly, noting

the importance of having a Confucius Institute on campus to institutional leadership at

the time:

I want to say around [year] we had applied to host a Confucius Institute, and it

wasn't accepted. And we knew this might be hard as a regional to get, but we

reapplied in [year]. This was important to our president. We actually made a trip

to China and to Beijing and to the Hanban and submitted our application and just

said, we're serious. This is really important to us. And the second time we applied,

we did get the Confucius Institute, and it was celebrated. We celebrated it in our

community because of the peers that we were associated with in the United States.

Despite this comment about "peers we were associated with" following the establishment of the Confucius Institute, the association with other institutions with Confucius Institutes was an ancillary benefit to ARU. Being associated with other institutions with Confucius Institutes was not viewed as a negative but was never a main factor in the original establishment on campus.

The Confucius Institute at ARU had several staff members, including a director and other support staff that oversaw various programs, services, and partnerships. The staff at the Confucius Institute also played a role in the overseas recruitment efforts of Chinese students as a component of the recruitment and internationalization strategy for the institution. In addition to the role within the campus, the Confucius Institute at ARU was involved in the support of a dual-immersion language program within the local K–12 schools, supporting Chinese language instruction for students in this setting. As this chapter progresses, further context to the campus-community connection between ARU and its community, and the connections to internationalization and the Confucius Institute is highlighted.

Institutional Attributes and Features

With a background of the case site as well as the Confucius Institute at ARU, there are additional findings and contextual factors that help define the case site and overall connection to the research questions. In this section, I provide additional understanding of the overall case and environment at ARU. Emphasizing the journey to internationalization, the current definition and understanding of internationalization, various perspectives on internationalization at ARU, I highlight what I found as the

institutional perspective on internationalization and the various components which comprise it and have led to its success within the context of ARU.

Internationalization at ARU

A major goal of this study was to uncover how institutional leaders at ARU define and understand internationalization within their institutional environment. A key takeaway from the understanding of internationalization is that it has two general connection points in the mind of participants, though the lenses of mobility and overall benefit to the student experience. In this case, and for ARU today, much of internationalization is viewed through the lenses of inbound (recruitment and enrollment of international students) and outbound mobility (ARU students studying abroad). The student experience is generally contextualized to mean the benefits that students receive from gaining a global perspective through their collegiate experience, including interactions with people and ideas outside of their respective backgrounds, and connection of global learning to student outcomes, both postsecondary and beyond.

The foundation laid within the historical, local, and sociocultural contexts created an environment in which ARU was participating and engaging with internationalization activities for the past 60 years—even before the idea of internationalization in higher education became mainstream. This environment fostered a connection of mobility as a key component of internationalization at ARU for many years, leading to it being a key component of internationalization strategy today. A cabinet-level institutional leader recalled international students being a key part of the fabric of the institution during their childhood:

[A relative] worked on campus when I was a young [person] in the 1970s, so I

watched campus through their eyes and there were a tremendous number of

international students here in the 70s. This is not a new thing. So, it always

surprises me when people say, well, the community isn't accepting. Every one of

my neighbors took in international students and they did homestays then, and that

was totally normal for our culture and everything that we did as part of the

neighborhood. Those international students lived there and participated in all of

that [campus and community events] in the 1970s.

In the present day, internationalization continues to be an important element of the

institutional ethos at ARU. While many participants described internationalization within

the context of mobility, the definitions often differed and other key examples were

offered—generally finding difference based on the participant's connection to

internationalization and job responsibilities within the larger organization. Many of the

examples offered related to internationalization focused on the people involved and the

benefit to the students and local community. This sentiment was based in the

understanding of rurality and sense of responsibility to provide a global perspective

connected to the overall student experience. An institutional leader defined

internationalization at ARU in this manner:

[Internationalization is] creating global opportunities for students, faculty, staff,

and the community, and helping our students become global citizens and create

opportunities for them, too. Well, that's the short answer; a little longer answer is

we have a strategic plan and it's threefold. We want enrollment to be diversified

and globalized. And part of that is looking at making sure that we're diversified

internationally, that we're not too heavy on one particular region or country,

helping our domestic students have global experiences either on campus or going

abroad, and that our faculty and staff helping them develop a curriculum that is

globalized, as well as having global experiences.

The definition above situates internationalization as a multifaceted process that spans

beyond student mobility through international student recruitment/enrollment and study

abroad programs. This definition also references a strategy to internationalization,

alluding to it being an institutional-wide priority and task with support from leadership at

the highest levels. It also begins framing what I found to be a key component of

internationalization and the benefits of mobility—how several participants drew a direct

connection from mobility to the overall student experience at ARU, a major finding to be

further extrapolated later in this chapter. A second definition was offered by another

institutional leader, who noted:

. . . It isn't just that we offer some study abroad. It's as all-encompassing as

possible. So, bringing international students to the university so that those

American students who are here and can't study abroad or don't want to

study abroad, they still get some experience with people from other cultures.

Both definitions offered situate internationalization through mobility but also work to

embody a comprehensive approach focusing on the benefits that students receive on

campus through connections with other students and classroom experiences. Beyond

mobility, some participants alluded to a sense of duty to provide different perspectives

given the rural location of ARU. As a teaching institution, a faculty leader identified the

importance of internationalization in the classroom, connecting it again to the student experience.

> I think that [decisions from institutional leadership to emphasize internationalization] helped put more of a priority in having more international students here to expose them to different cultures and different ways of thinking, which I completely love. I think is so important for so many of these [students] that are from more rural communities. A lot of them have never been outside of [the state] to even ever be exposed to it [global perspectives]. I think that that's a part of our job. It's an academic institution to provide opportunities with people and places and things.

Echoing the importance of internationalization within the classroom, a staff member built upon this definition and noted the importance of viewing internationalization beyond the mobility lens:

> I think when people first hear the word internationalization, they're thinking of just bringing international students to campus and just having them step right in line with the students that are already here. And that is, in my opinion, so far from the truth. Bringing international students to campus and having that mixture within the student body is incredibly important. You have to give this incredible population the opportunity to shine and to share their knowledge and background in a variety of different ways, whether it be in the classroom, giving them the opportunity to discuss or bring up points of, you know, my parents run their business like this or and that's a little bit different than what we're discussing in class, just to bring that global perspective to a lot of things.

To understand internationalization at ARU is to conceptualize its deep-rooted connections to student mobility and the student experience. As a teaching institution, the decisions made related to internationalization centered the benefits that it would provide ARU, the student experience, and the community through diversification and preparing students to work in a global economy. There are several key factors and levers which helped drive internationalization and contribute to its entrenchment in the institutional culture, which are further explored below.

Institutional Leadership, Faculty, and Staff

As a regional institution, many of the leaders at ARU have connections to the local area through their own families or life experiences. As such, many of the leaders are keenly aware of the context in which ARU operates. This understanding necessitates leadership from a place of agility, adapting to the needs of the institution, regulations from the state legislature, governing board, and perspectives of the local community. Thinking in terms of internationalization, institutional leadership was a key component that placed it at the forefront of institutional priority. Although other factors, such as enrollment-based incentive funding, contributed to the desire to internationalize, the experiences of leadership members and their own belief in the value internationalization brings to campus remained core to its success at ARU. A cabinet-level institutional leader discussed leadership in this manner:

> I think there are certain drivers [to internationalization], but I want to be clear up front, the internationalization efforts across the campus are the direct result of the presidential priorities. . . . We had two presidents who really emphasized

internationalization and building international relationships. That's not an idea

that would have come out of the community, but it was a presidential priority.

This priority was a clear directive and active choice from the highest levels of

institutional leadership, as previous leaders created metrics and outcomes to recruit a

more diverse and international student class to ARU. Such efforts led to the centralization

of internationalization offices and units, emphasizing the importance of the international

perspective, and bringing these various constituents under a similar reporting structure. A

staff member further expanded on the importance of leadership, noting:

> Well, strong leadership at the present cabinet level, I think is so important. And
>
> because then that becomes motivating for us as a team, but also when the campus
>
> knows that this is a priority. People are motivated, you know, things that are
>
> important to the president or to the cabinet or to their respective vice president
>
> becomes important to those that that fall or that fall under these individuals. So
>
> that, to me, is the biggest motivator.

The interest of leadership in internationalization often stemmed from personal

experiences. Some participants referenced meeting international students in their own

educational journeys, while others mentioned transformative education abroad

experiences throughout their careers or personal lives. A faculty member also referenced

the importance of steady leadership with an explicit interest to promote

internationalization, given their own experience with internationalization on other

campuses:

> I do know that we have had some key players. What I've learned as [a faculty
>
> member and leader] is that institutions are only as strong as the personalities who

drive them. And if you have people who are not committed to a particular program, it doesn't matter how strong the program is, it will fall apart. I watched that happen with [a person's] programs. They [had extensive experience at an institution]. And as soon as they left, they put somebody else in place and expected the programs to continue—yet they literally dissolved around them. So, I think from my perspective, if you have people who are committed to bringing international students or [other students] on campus, that's where your emphasis will lie and that's how you'll get your budgeting done.

Several participants indicated some form of connection to internationalization through personal experiences, or some form of professional experience either through ARU or at another institution. Some of these international experiences participants referenced were a product of the cultural exchange programs hosted through the Confucius Institute as well. A local community member referenced a trip to China to learn about the educational system as a transformative experience. An institutional staff member identified international experiences that other cabinet-level executives had shared with their own collegiate experiences that created a drive to internationalize. A career faculty member and community leader mentioned their own connection to internationalization which developed later in their career. Another faculty member recalled several connection points across their family history of higher education internationalization and their own institutional experiences across the United States. Two additional faculty members discussed several teaching experiences abroad leading to their push towards internationalization in their area and referenced several international teaching experiences

and belief that their subject matter helps connect students to the larger global environment.

Taken in aggregate and in combination with the institutional support from high levels of leadership, the background and experiences of many faculty and staff members at ARU contributed to the development and value of internationalization at ARU. These individual level experiences and personal values, at various levels across the institutional organization chart, further promoted internationalization as important within the overall institutional environment. However, this view was not necessarily shared by all faculty and staff, with one faculty member noting that some faculty find participating in internationalization or other elements they view as outside of the scope of their role as an additional challenge:

I think that some of them [faculty members] feel like it's a lot of extra work and a lot of extra time for them to have to worry about the entire international piece of it and that it should be left up to the international office. I don't agree with that. I think I have to make sure that in the things that I do and say that that I'm I am trying to expose students to new things, new models to try to improve the educational experience. And, I think I have to take that on myself. So, I don't think that it's shared. No, unfortunately, I don't think it is [the push toward internationalization]. And I don't know why. That's why it's a big passion of mine.

The role of leadership in fostering an environment and enacting decisions that allowed for internationalization to develop and supported the application and establishment of a Confucius Institute was key. As one participant noted, the priorities of the institutional leadership drive the priorities of the overall institution. Without leadership viewing

internationalization as an added value to the campus environment and something worth investing time, resources, funds, and personnel in, the outcome at ARU would likely be different. For ARU, the fortunate combination of these personal experiences, directives from senior leadership, and desire to provide a different type of experience to their students led to an embedding of internationalization as an important charge of the student experience.

The Student Experience

Returning to the understanding of regional institutions established in the literature review of this study, several key elements describe and define such institutions: (1) meeting diverse needs of different states particularly at the baccalaureate and master's levels but including less than baccalaureate programs and doctoral programs in selected professional fields; and (2) being predominately open-access institutions that emphasize equal opportunity (Harcleroad & Ostar, 1987). The context of ARU is similar, with a focus on the experience of a diverse population of students, as noted in the background context, as well as the role of being open-access and emphasizing the opportunity available to create a positive educational experience. The student experience was frequently cited to understand how internationalization is viewed with student experiences both within the institutional setting and post-graduation. In this case, outcomes are defined as a key component of the student experience. This definition stems from the institution's understanding of the student experience connecting to post-graduate outcomes and these themes being viewed as interconnected through interviews. A cabinet-level leader described the student experience in this manner:

I think it's the student experience, ultimately, that is our priority for any student. The experience that they have here, we are deeply passionate about this place, whether it's the community or the team members or the students or the employees. We are all deeply passionate about the success of [ARU]. We are known for doing more with less. We are known for being innovative. I think we are big enough to be healthy, but small enough still to be under the radar and able to try some innovative things to see how they impact the student experience that we may not be able to try out a huge institution. And I think ultimately it is our community feeling of we will do anything for your success, and we will do anything to make everybody feel part of that. That makes us special.

Throughout interviews, participants referenced several key considerations and benefits that internationalization brings to the campus community. Many of the campus-level benefits cited by participants reference the increased diversity that international students bring, echoing the campus focus on mobility as a primary metric and defining feature of internationalization. Secondarily, the benefits of diverse faculty and staff and the various perspective-sharing that occurs through many students learning and engaging with people of other backgrounds is mentioned throughout interviews. Participants noted a clear connection point between the idea of internationalization through mobility and the benefit it creates for the overall student experience at ARU.

The rural location of ARU and the homogeneous nature of the student body are two connected characteristics of the institution identified through interviews. There was a clear connection that participants viewed between international student enrollment and increased diversity within a relatively non-diverse environment. A staff member noted

this and provided examples of this learning occurring in various aspects of the classroom and co-curriculum at ARU:

> Well, one [benefit to campus] I point to is to the rural nature and the homogenous makeup of our student body we serve. We serve a rural population. Maybe you left the state or maybe not, but many haven't been out [of the area or state], not been exposed to a lot of the world, let alone the United States. And so, we owe it as a service to our students to help our students have to develop a broader perspective of the world. I'd love to have every student go on a study abroad, but I know that that's not realistic. But if they have a roommate or if they have a classmate from another country that shows a different perspective in class or create a friendship, or an experience like rooming with someone from a different country, that really is life changing. So, I think this the education from an educational point of view, globalizing and creating global experiences for our students is imperative to prepare them for the future.

The benefits to students were also echoed by a cabinet-level institution leader, who said about students experiencing other cultures: "it's important that they [non-international students] get exposed to students from around the world. I think that culturally, it's healthy." The benefits of internationalization extend beyond the peer-to-peer relationships, according to another comment by a staff member who said: "I would also I'd also add that having a diverse faculty and staff and people that have had experiences outside enhances the university and curriculum. And so, I think that that is also incredibly valuable." Additionally, a cabinet-level leader stated: "So, diversity, equity, and inclusion is really the name of the game and lot of it is, of course, because we're in [location]. This

is almost entirely white community. There's not much diversity here. So, the students that we're bringing to campus is more diverse than the city or the county or the region of the state around us."

This emphasis on internationalization benefitting the student experience comes from an in–depth understanding of the students that ARU serves. A staff member referenced that many students who attend ARU come from more rural areas of the state and may not have traveled, met someone from a different cultural background, or been exposed to any sort of perspectives outside of their own. With this understanding, many of the institutional leaders, faculty, and staff I interviewed understood the responsibility they felt they had to provide the learning environment for students to gain such perspectives. A staff member further elaborated on their perspective of the students at ARU:

> I guess you would say that students who come to this university are often, I think first generation students, they don't come from privileged backgrounds. I guess over time, maybe this has changed, but generally have not. They haven't traveled internationally or have had the experience of college, and so they haven't passed on that to their children. I guess that's what I know. Not a very good answer, perhaps, but to differentiate our students versus her in our type of institution versus others, I guess that's how I would approach it. Is that. Our students can be pushed a little bit more to be shown what's possible, because they haven't gotten that perspective before they got to the university here.

This focus on the student experience and internationalization connects to student-level outcomes within the classroom and post-graduation. As with other higher education

institutions, ARU recognizes the role that they play in creating an environment where students can excel post-graduation in an increasingly globalized labor market. Noting that skills like developing a second language and understanding an intercultural perspective can have on job outcomes, a staff member said:

> The other thing is that when we internationalize campus and we develop networks around the globe, then we create opportunities for our students for meaningful employment [opportunities] or internships. And the fact of the matter is that our students are going to be competing with the global market. And if they have developed a second language or have developed global competency where they're able to interact and work effectively with people from all over the world, we're putting out a much better product than if we just did our thing and didn't open up to the world.

The importance of preparing students for a global job market was mentioned by participants, noting that many graduates of ARU continue on to more metropolitan locations. There was a common understanding that students—regardless of where they ultimately will be employed—require global skills to be successful and competitive in today's labor market. This perspective was further contextualized by a staff member:

> It's our one of our main purposes is to prepare students for the workforce, and if they don't have any global perspective, they're going to be behind others who are applying for the jobs that they want. Maybe they don't want to stay in [location]. They're going to be applying for jobs in big cities. They're going to be competing with students who probably come from an educational background that did include some global study, some internationalization, and they're competing with

[that]. . . . And if they don't have any kind of awareness, even a basic awareness

of other cultures and how other systems work, they're behind.

External accrediting bodies with curricular requirements to promote global themes and

international perspectives is another method by which internationalization influences the

student experience in academic programs. In the context of ARU, this accreditation does

not apply to the entire institution writ large, but rather one academic program that views

this specific accreditation credential as important to its teaching and public service

mission. A faculty member elaborated on the role of accreditation and credentialing here,

as an underlying force that helps push for internationalization:

We have one other element that helps influence this [internationalization]. And

that is our accreditation, our [disciplinary accreditation]. You have to demonstrate

a global perspective, and a lot of institutions can do that where we teach

international [subject matter] or we have these partner schools. And I just I'd like

to push that up a notch, right? Yes, we teach it [global themes], yes, we provide

classes and yes, we support study abroad. Yes, we send faculty abroad. Yes, we

have international programs. I mean, so there is another element, but I will say it's

not the driving force.

This focus on the student experience exists beyond the larger vision of curriculum and

career-level outcomes for students and is also embodied by the structural changes to

internationalization-related offices under previous institutional leadership at ARU. While

not directly espoused as related to the student experience, a few participants noted these

structural changes being of particular benefit to international students. A staff member

noted the importance that this structural presence and steady leadership has had on the

international student experience—creating direct connection points for international students with ARU staff members who can assist with the various, nuanced aspects of the international student experience. In its aggregate, the student experience is a defining motivator and factor of internationalization, promotion of mobility programs and embedding internationalization in various areas of the curriculum at ARU.

Student Experience and Connection to Institutional Mission

The common mission of public regional institutions is to serve the students enrolled as a teaching institution as well as the local community and area in which it is situated. Public regional institutions are often economic drivers for their communities, as well as beacons of prosperity and growth for rural areas, referenced by the idea of anchor institutions (Harris & Holley, 2016; Birch, Perry, & Taylor, 2013). These same institutions often face accusations of mission creep (Bok, 2015) for activities that extend outside of the scope of this mission, such as internationalization. I asked participants to offer insight of this perceived juxtaposition of mission versus institutional action of engaging in internationalization. These two ideas were not seen as competing, but rather as two concepts in tandem that further support the goals of a teaching institution and serving the local community. A cabinet-level leader described how they view these ideas as follows:

> To me, it's really not much of a contradiction because it is all based on how you define the student experience. If you define the student experience as being very insular, very focused on memorizing facts rather than experiential learning, then internationalization really doesn't have a role. But if you focus on access and

affordability, but also have a huge component of quality and a transformational

experience, internationalization is a significant part of what a student should

experience if they want to be different when they're done. So, I don't really see

this a conflict.

A similar sentiment was echoed by a separate cabinet level leader, who stated:

I don't think it ever hurts our community or any community to be educated to a

number of different ideas, and they get to pick and choose what makes sense to

them. But I think international students being able to experience rural [location],

and it helps our students who will go off and work in global economies and across

the world have a first foray into that. So, I don't see that as a conflict. We are here

to serve our region and we do serve our region.

The teaching mission of public regional institutions and the opportunity for

internationalization to provide forms of experiential learning to students resonated with a

faculty member, who noted that the mission of ARU is not to "do research and bring in

new knowledge" but to provide learning experiences that connect a student's classroom

experience to the context of their learning in the field. Additionally, such learning

provides positive externalities for the local community by educating students on the

world outside of the rural location of ARU, given so many students being from this area.

Said this faculty member:

I think our mission is focused more on the teaching element. So, taking students

to Spain or Italy should have a learning focus. You know, all I'm saying is, is

there is a place for it [internationalization] in a regional university? Yes. Our

focus is on teaching and learning. And my gosh, what's a better way of doing that

than to take that student to Normandy, have them see and feel and hear those experiences. That only really proves the benefit of the learning process for students.

A similar sentiment was echoed by an institutional staff member:

I guess I'm having a hard time seeing them as conflicting [internationalization and the institutional mission]. To me, that's what I love about [ARU], it brings all of those pieces together. And I think that because we have the internationalization to the degree that we do, it makes our regional university offerings as a teaching institution that much more rich. So, I don't see them as conflicting, I see them more as already conjoined here. And I've worked on other campuses and it just it feels different here than at other institutions in the state of [location] that I've worked at.

These perspectives are not shared by all within the data collection process. Interviews provided a secondhand account of anecdotes where faculty members questioned internationalization activities overall, including student mobility and education abroad, with questions as to their fit within the larger institutional mission. A cabinet-level leader offered insight into how some faculty and staff may feel that internationalization is contrary to the mission and creates concerns of how these new perspectives may change the institution:

[Some people say] we're crazy going outside of our mission, which is to serve the rural communities of [state]. That was our original mission. But again, that type of bias is also what a lot of our students are coming in with—their families have not put it as s focus to expose them to different environments and different things. In

fact, they're sometimes even a fear of it. And I I've seen it with faculty. There's almost a fear: "You know what, if what if we bring an outsider in, how's that going to change [ARU]?"

These findings suggest that many, but not all, on campus at ARU view internationalization as a part of the institutional mission because of their own experiences, priorities from leadership, a larger cultural connection to such values across the institution and local community, and belief of its connection to the student experience. As such, I asked participants if they felt like public regional institutions have a different conceptualization and rationale for engaging in internationalization as compared to research institutions or community colleges. Across respondents, participants either mentioned directly or alluded to the special place that public regional institutions occupy within the larger higher education sector. A staff member offered these thoughts:

We're obviously a small regional university. I think for the universities that do research where that's their primary focus, they have a little different focus for their internationalization. We're not looking to open up foreign markets or to get research or, you know, researchers from other universities. For us, it's really more about opening the doors and just getting more exposure and more opportunities for international experience. Trying to bring international students here and give them the experience of being in the United States and getting that experience and that education and those opportunities that come with, you know, having a network, having a system in another country, in this case, the United States.

Institutional mission is an important guiding factor and point of controversy in the

literature for public regional institutions. When participants were asked if acting globally

and looking outward beyond the institution to internationalize was contrary to their

mission to serve the local community, many saw these as connected to the overall

institutional mission. The sense that these things are interconnected, and the benefits of

internationalization connected to the institutional mission via the student experience was

a key finding across participants. Viewing internationalization through this lens is a new

perspective, given the criticism that public regional institutions have faced in the

literature for seeking to emulate research institutions in areas such as internationalization.

Notably, factors like agility—mentioned below—help public regional institutions like

ARU meet both goals of mission-centeredness and student experience simultaneously.

Institutional Agility as an Enabler to Student and Community Success

Several participants commented on the institution's ability to adapt and change at

the institutional and departmental levels. Often mentioned under the premise of meeting

the needs of the community, ensuring positivity in the student experience, or responding

to the needs of the campus, the idea of institutional agility was mentioned as a force

towards successful and positive experiences with internationalization, specifically.

Higher education is not known as an industry with an agile approach to change

management; often change is burdensome, cumbersome, and executed slowly. At ARU,

participants generally noted that the institution is not only agile, but also has a sense of

support from faculty and staff to put in place changes or revisions as necessitated by

agility. It is this "pioneer spirit" mentioned by a cabinet-level leader coupled with the

ability to be agile that creates positive experiences for the campus and local community,

as described by a staff member, referencing the community connection as well as agility in the curriculum:

> All institutions serve their communities, but I think we feel a unique sense of responsibility to serve our local community because we regionals tend to be a little bit smaller, which allows you to be a little bit more connected. At least at our institution, the town-gown relationships are critical. There are large universities in small communities, and I would argue that those relationships are very important. We depend on each other a great deal for our success. [Location] needs the university and we need the [location]. We all need to cooperate. I think that certainly our mission supports that, but also that close connection that we feel to our community, and I think most regionals fall under that. I think the other thing that may not be what you've asked, but I think regionals can be more agile in a large part. We have agility that large, larger universities, research ones just don't have. I think that is also a factor in our ability to make things happen.

This sense of agility seemingly stems from the historical context of the institution and its need to respond to the changing demographics and nature of the community in which it is situated. Coupled with the need to respond to state level policy changes, changes across the higher education sector, and globalization—bringing about the start of institutional internationalization, the mission of ARU as a public regional institution calls for an agile approach to addressing need. A cabinet-level leader offered thoughts on agility as an important part of the institutional ethos:

> I think we have the tradition of higher ed experience with a whole bunch of things we've had to adapt and change to attract people to rural [location] to continue to

provide the student experience that we have. We also contribute to a labor market that is so changing right now, to keep and retain faculty and staff in [location]. I think we have to work together as a community to be able to do that. There's just a number of things that makes you different. But I think we're agile because we have been that scrappy younger child that has to keep finding out who we are and digging deep and moving forward.

A separate cabinet-level leader connected this sense of agility as not only a result of the campus spirit, but also borne of practical necessity resulting from the need to implement institutional leadership priorities, particularly in the areas of institutional growth to meet student demand. Even with the practical challenges that come from an institution willing to quickly adapt and make change, there are still challenges that must be addressed:

But we've grown to the point that we continue to have to hire additional faculty just to keep up with the number of sections that need to be taught, particularly in the face-to-face model, because we used a lot of adjuncts in the online world. We've grown enrollments from about [number] to [fewer than 15,000] in a year. The staff has not grown nearly as fast as the faculty side, and they're we're finding a lot of pinch points. We're trying to address those.

This sentiment of agility and the spirit of "making things happen" was also echoed by others, particularly in relation to the international student experience. Several staff noted the agile approach and spirit was what made internationalization initiatives at ARU so successful. A staff member referenced a sentiment of "just working together to see how we can make [it] happen," referring to general cultural programming. A staff member referenced this agility indirectly in mentioning financial support to the overall

administrative structure allowing the international areas on campus to create experiences that provided a direct return on investment for the student experience in connection with what international students mentioned needing. Said a staff member:

> [Institutional leadership] was very supportive of our idea of creating [streamlined unit] and paid very close attention to the creation of a designated international recruitment team. That's where that funding line came from for the creation of international tuition [specific to international students] was to fund their recruitment efforts. It created a streamlining of income that we could then use to try to get a return on the investment of those tuition dollars by the university.

A staff member referenced the idea of agility as a benefit to a public regional institution, in particular: "I think the benefit we have at a regional is we can really get into the weeds. I think we see the impact and have fewer silos. It's easier to work across departments and engage in conversations and activities, hopefully having a broader reach." This quote sums up the benefits of institutional agility well, bringing to the forefront not only the necessity of agility but the ability to be agile in meeting the needs of the institution and the student experience. Agility served as a key component that helped drive internationalization at ARU and created an attitude among the campus community that such flexibility and adaptability was a part of their role.

The Confucius Institute at ARU

When asked about the purpose of the Confucius Institute at ARU, most participants seemed to have a somewhat indifferent perspective to its presence and purpose on campus; however, this indifference recognized its positive contributions to campus and the community. Overwhelmingly, participants referenced two major themes

when describing their perception of the purpose of the Confucius Institute: (1) the cultural sharing and educational component; and (2) the community connection to the local K–12 schools. Beyond the Confucius Institute being present on campus and the benefits presented to ARU and the community, other important purposes of the Confucius Institute from respondents were noted as its ability to serve as a support system and cultural hub for Chinese international students on campus and local Chinese families and scholars in the community, as referenced by a staff member. A separate staff described the purpose of the Confucius Institute in this manner, summing up many similar sentiments across participants:

> My understanding of the role of the Confucius Center is to provide access to opportunities about the Chinese culture and language to youth in our community. And also, to provide access to the same type of cultural experiences and opportunities to students on our campus and students who are visiting our campus from China.

The Confucius Institute at ARU prides itself on the place it occupies to share culture and provide a means to assist in diversifying the local community. Through events as well as language classes throughout the year, their reach is one that extends to the community and reaches members of all ages. These programs and events mirror the general national understanding and approach of Confucius Institutes at other institutions. A staff member described the purpose of the Confucius Institute in this way:

> The purpose of the Confucius Institute—[is] to promote the Chinese language and culture to this community. For now, we provide a Chinese class to the university level. Also, we provide Chinese courses for the middle school and high school in

this community. We provide a Chinese teacher and a textbook and curriculum,

and they will provide a beginner, intermediate and advanced Chinese class for the

community. And then we also have a different culture activity during the year,

like a Chinese New Year and Dragon Boat Festival or the Mid-Autumn Festival.

It's all free of charge and all the community and the student. They all can

participate.

The educational outreach activities of the Confucius Institute at ARU were like other

Confucius Institute programs located at higher education institutions across the United

States. Prior to the pandemic, the Confucius Institute also provided funding to support a

summer camp program for local K–12 students enrolled in Chinese courses. This

experience was described by a staff member in this manner:

And then before the pandemic, we also provide a free summer camp experience in

China. The local high school students, if they take the Chinese class, they can

apply to participate in the three-week summer program in China. The student only

needs to provide the airline ticket and the visa. When they go to China, they will

go visit different famous destinations like the Great Wall of China or the

Forbidden City. We will also have different cultural activities, like a calligraphy

or tai chi, and they also have Chinese class. All the lodging, transportation, meals,

it's all free of charge.

A former student participated in one of these trips hosted by the Confucius Institute and

mentioned a positive experience in getting to experience local culture as well as practice

Chinese language skills. Even with the clear goal of cultural diplomacy through these

educational experiences, this participant understood that there could be perceived

controversies with this trip hosted through the Confucius Institute. With a nod to the perceived controversies surrounding Confucius Institutes, they described their experience on the trip:

> Essentially, it was like a culture and language trip. . . . It was such an interesting experience because with the Confucius Institute, they just wanted to share their culture. But you didn't feel like they were pushing any agenda on you. It was just like they were showing you around.

The partnership between the Confucius Institute, ARU, and the local community was a recurring topic across several interviews throughout data collection. In support of the sentiment of cultural engagement across the community, a staff member identified the Confucius Institute as a key mechanism for ARU was able to engage the community with global themes, cultural exchange, and contribute to overall internationalization. This finding reinforces the role that internationalization plays as a link between ARU and the community and the Confucius Institute serving as a connection point of educational outreach and initiatives between these two entities. This staff member described this connection in this way:

> So, what it [the Confucius Institute] did is it really gave us a really powerful tool to engage the community more than everything else had really been geared towards students, faculty, and on campus. But this really gave us a tool to engage our community. I think it's just as important to help our community globalize and to be open to a shrinking world. That was particularly powerful.

One of the commonly mentioned benefits of the Confucius Institute on campus at ARU was the perception that its presence correlated with an increased presence of Chinese students and growing Chinese student enrollment at ARU, along with the ability to recruit new visiting scholars and expand language program offerings. A staff member identified these benefits and their perception of increased enrollment growth in this way:

> I think there are several [benefits]. I think perhaps the most obvious one is that we were able to get qualified instructors of Mandarin Chinese to come and teach classes. That was probably the most direct connection academically. Also, I have nothing to back this up, but the fact that [ARU] has a Confucius Institute might have persuaded Chinese students to come here. If they have a Confucius Institute on campus, they are probably welcoming of Chinese people and Chinese culture. We still have a lot of Chinese students coming here and visiting scholars, too. Just the fact that we had a Confucius Institute at this relatively small, unknown university in the middle of nowhere, USA—they must be welcoming.

A separate staff member referenced this perception in their interview, noting that there was a wide perception on campus and within the local community that the increase in Chinese students on campus was due to the opening and increased presence of the Confucius Institute on campus. This perception was refuted, and this staff member noted that the growth was likely attributed to increased recruitment and internationalization at the senior leadership level as opposed to being a direct result of the Confucius Institute. Said this staff member:

Well, let me tell you what it's not. A lot of people on campus thought that there was a correlation between the enrollment of Chinese students and the establishment of the Confucius Institute. I can't think of an instance where a Chinese student came to [ARU] because we have a Confucius Institute. But that's what was asked [and assumed]. And they made that assumption that because our enrollment of Chinese students was growing around the same time as the Confucius Institute.

The Confucius Institute at ARU served several purposes within the campus and local community. One of the most important purposes the Confucius Institute served was one of cultural education and exploration through the various cultural learning, language teaching, and travel provided through its presence. Even with the challenges that arose at the federal and state levels for Confucius Institutes, ARU felt that the benefits received from its presence was justified even amid controversy. The controversies of Confucius Institutes did extend to ARU but were understood and contextualized differently based on its status as a public regional institution, as noted in the ensuing section.

The nature of ARU is one defined not only by its purpose as a public regional institution, but also its contributions as a pillar of its community. These findings indicate that ARU is aware of its mission and purpose and has seen value in connecting an in-depth and thorough internationalization strategy to benefit the student experience and its community. Throughout an in-depth exploration of the context of ARU, there were key themes which emerged to contextualize the case: (1) an understanding of internationalization and its different levers; (2) the historical context which led to an

environment of effective internationalization; (3) connecting internationalization—and student mobility—to the overall student experience, and (4) being willing to adapt and try new things through institutional agility to meet institutional goals and better the student experience. There are also other areas which provide further understanding to elicit a thick description of the case (Merriam, 1988, 1998) including the sociopolitical and local/community contexts.

Sociopolitical Context and State-Level Politics of American Regional University

The environment which surrounds the overall case ecosystem is another important area to contextualize in describing American Regional University. ARU is in a conservative state, with a conservative supermajority at the state level. Even with these values guiding state policy and decision-making, ARU has benefitted greatly from the support of the state legislature in terms of finances and other support. Combined with the permeating sociocultural values of the state, shared with the ARU community, this sociopolitical context and understanding of state-level support further illuminates the environment of ARU and its internationalization efforts. This section will discuss (1) the context of the Confucius Institute and state-level politics; (2) the relationship between ARU and the state; and (3) an understanding of finances and internationalization at ARU, including state incentives for increased enrollments and financial support.

Sociopolitical Context and State Politics of the Confucius Institute

Although the specific challenges and future direction of the Confucius Institute at ARU cannot be presented in these findings to preserve anonymity, there will undoubtedly be changes in ARU's approach to its relationship with the Confucius Institute and the Hanban. The state context is important to understand, with political pressures at both the

state and federal level to close the Confucius Institute impacting ARU. Even with campus level support of the Institute—which there clearly is, based on findings in this study—the potential for oversight at the state and federal level is great, given the context of the U.S. and China relationship at present. Through legislation presented at the federal level, it is likely that Confucius Institutes may not exist on any campuses in the U.S. in the coming years. As these possibilities shifted closer to reality, a staff member described the institutional response:

> And as soon as we started talking about closing the Confucius Institute, all the questions focused around how are we going to keep Chinese language immersion programs running? How are we going to keep teaching people the Chinese language? Those are the benefits we saw in the Confucius Institutes and provided resources to be able to do that. The question never was, is China and the Chinese language a bad thing? And should we get it out of our society? That was never the conversation. The conversation was, we want to understand. We want people who to speak and communicate. The question then became, how do we continue the good things are happening without all the baggage that a Confucius Institute carries?

The sentiments of the uncertain future of the Confucius Institute at ARU were echoed by a staff member who noted the importance of the purpose of the Confucius Institute and how a possible closure could force the institution to rethink internationalization in a positive way, and possibly contribute additional funding:

> I think the foundation of the Confucius Institute has provided a return on investment. I think there's support on campus, but also locally to continue

providing those services [offered by the Confucius Institute]. I think we might even have more latitude to internationalize. . . . We're not limited to China. We can broaden. We have more latitude, as an institution, we can be more strategic. For example, we were relying on the Confucius Institute to provide faculty. [The institution may now have to provide] their own resources to hire full time faculty, which now makes it a lot easier to [have increased support]. In some ways I think [a closure could force us to have] more skin in the game now [for internationalization]. When it's your own money, you're going to make sure it goes a lot further. . . . From here, [a closure] could give us little bit more latitude on what we do and things that might be more beneficial to the community.

Even though the benefits of the Confucius Institute at ARU are clear and documented within this specific case, the overall conversation surrounding U.S.-China educational partnerships at the federal and state level may preclude and challenge the future of Confucius Institutes in the United States. In the aggregate, some participants noted that the absence of a Confucius Institute "wouldn't really change much" about what ARU is doing in terms of internationalization—since the Institute itself is a part of the overall strategy. Returning to the idea of agility, ARU can adapt and change its approach, as needed, based on outcomes at the state and federal levels to continue their approach to internationalization even if the Confucius Institute program ceases operation.

An Impact Despite Controversies for the Confucius Institute

The Confucius Institute at ARU has not been immune to many of the controversies that have plagued and impacted other Confucius Institutes in the United States—but the degree to which these controversies were felt differed at ARU. When

asked about their perceptions of the overall controversies, most participants mentioned

being tangentially aware of what those controversies were. However, many were not

certain how they might play out at ARU given its public regional status. With the

predominant narrative of controversy relating to national security, members of the

ARU community I interviewed felt that this narrative was a mismatch based on their

campus type and what they had experienced with the Confucius Institute in their

community. In addition, many of the participants recognized that there may be some truth

to the overall perception of these controversies but put into context that the fear may be

politically motivated as a part of shifting political relationships.

There have been several controversies surrounding the Confucius Institute at the

national level which impacted ARU over recent years. Many of these controversies have

centered around the dominant narrative of Confucius Institutes at the federal level, with

calls to close the Institute from both federal and state level policymakers. When asked

about when participants first became aware of controversies at the national level related

to Confucius Institutes, many, like this staff member, "associated them with the time

frame of the Trump presidency, and some of the conflict between the Trump

administration and China." Nearly all participants became aware of such controversies

when they began to become more discussed in mainstream media, because of federal

policy initiatives aimed at closure of Confucius Institutes in the United States. Another

staff member provided this overview of the perception of controversies and low-key

nature of the response across the campus and community:

> It [the reception and perception of the Confucius Institute] was great. There was a
>
> positive, collaborative, and supportive view of the Confucius Institute. We didn't

really start seeing any issues until there were accusations on the federal level that

were made regarding Chinese students Confucius Institutes—things like that. And

even then, I don't think it was really well known that we had a Confucius Institute,

or our community didn't really care. Nobody was really up in arms over it.

At the federal level, several arguments have been made against Confucius Institutes,

including propagandizing the Chinese government to an American audience through the

notion of soft power (Nye, 1990, 2004, 2009) within the classroom setting. Accusations

of espionage, intellectual property theft, and threats to national security are common,

particularly for campuses receiving federal funding. In this study, this series of arguments

are referred to collectively as issues of national security. One of the key arguments

against any change in the status quo of the Confucius Institute at ARU was its public

regional status; participants often noted a general dissonance between the national

security argument and a public regional institution, such as ARU, which receives no

federal research funding. At one point, a cabinet-level participant rhetorically noted:

I would just say to them [external parties] directly—you know, we're a regional

university in a small town with no defense contracts, nothing like that. They

would say they're [the Confucius Institute staff] are here to spy, and I'd say, spy

on what? If you can show me something at our university that is sensitive, if

you're aware or if you can point me in the direction of something at our school

that is vulnerable for them to spy on, please tell me because I don't know of any.

A former faculty member offered insight into their perspective of the challenges in this

way:

Borrowing, stealing, artificial intelligence and technology, that sort of thing. We [members of the community] have some talks. What's going on here—is it worth keeping the Confucius Institute or do we go along with the trend and void our relationship with them? We concluded that they were doing much more good than anything that will be harmful here. Partly because [ARU] doesn't have a lot of research technology that we're concerned about. And [all they were doing] was promoting Chinese culture here.

This notion was further contextualized by another staff member, who noted the approval processes in place, particularly in the classroom, to safeguard against many of the concerns voiced by external parties:

I knew about [the controversies] because I think it was the University of Chicago, maybe, shut down their program. I wasn't worried about it too much because [ARU] doesn't really have any huge trade secrets or we don't have military research or anything that might have had, I don't know of any political or military implications. I guess I thought that if something were going on, we would know about it, students would say something. The faculty who came to teach the Chinese language classes, they have to have their syllabus approved by the [Department]. I guess I felt that there was there wasn't much risk to begin with.

A combination of federal and state policymakers as well as federal law enforcement agencies used the argument of national security in a push to close the Institute, according to a cabinet-level institutional leader. A separate cabinet-level leader noted that there were also conversations at the university cabinet level related to next steps with the Confucius Institute—but in the context of how to respond to possible federal and/or state

legislation, as opposed to internal movement to move towards closure of the Institute itself. A cabinet-level leader elaborated on this notion below, noting the focus towards the internal benefit of the Institute and alluding to ARU making decisions, as best as possible, in a mission-driven way:

> [I was told] you really need to be aware that it's something to be concerned about [Confucius Institutes], and that's all [federal and state policymakers, and federal law enforcement agencies] said. We became more aware that there could be potential problems, and that's something that the legislature was definitely more and more concerned about, and people who had access to security information maybe were more concerned about. But I think we were trying to act local and just take care of what we what we can be aware of happening here.

A staff member provided additional context into the perception of these controversies within the local community. Given ARU's location in a conservative area of a conservative state, many of the hot topics related to education as a part of the conservative platform—social and emotional learning, critical race theory—were frequently discussed within the community. However, the presence of the Confucius Institute was not; if anything, it was generally supported across the local community. Said this staff member:

> But in [location], a lot of concerns about a lot of the hot topics, whether it was social-emotional learning or critical race theory, there was a lot of talk and a lot of people concerned about those issues. But when it came to the Confucius Institute, I never felt like there was this undercurrent in the community. We would have heard about it if there were major undercurrents. We never got that locally, which

I think is a credit to the work we've done in the community [related to internationalization]. That wasn't our motivation, but it sure made a difference in the long run to have that community support. The controversies tended to be from the outside We had a lot of families that had kids learning Chinese and middle school and high school. For some students, they just this was their thing that they really connected to and gave them meaning that made them enjoy school. I would have a lot of families thanking us. And when they heard about negativity [about Confucius Institutes], it's at the national and state level. They would give us words of encouragement, saying, "Don't be bullied, don't let anyone close you down."

Beyond the larger federal challenges and national discourse, the Confucius Institute at ARU experienced many of the same larger contractual challenges as referenced by other reports on Confucius Institutes in the United States. In reviewing their contract with the Hanban to establish the Confucius Institute at ARU, several important items were either excluded or vague, including jurisdiction to settle disagreements and specific protections around the issue of academic freedom. Additionally, a staff member noted challenges with the Confucius Institute board and the overall governance of the Confucius Institute itself. Within the context of the state ARU is in, there were questions about the board's legal ability to govern the Confucius Institute being in direct contradiction with state law.

One of the outcomes of this research project was to understand the Confucius Institute's place within the larger scheme of internationalization at ARU as well as determining if it served as a driving factor to push towards increased internalization. When asked if participants view the Confucius Institute as a driving force behind increased institutional internationalization, the response was generally no. One

participant likened the Confucius Institute as a tool within the larger toolkit of

internationalization activities, but also noted that internationalization would be likely at

the same level if the Confucius Institute was not present.

When considering the Confucius Institute as a possible driver to

internationalization, some participants thought about the Institute more as a means by

which to further support the institutional and leadership prerogative to internationalize,

working to shift the mindset on campus of those skeptical of internationalization for

myriad reasons. Said a faculty member: "I think the biggest contributor was our

[institutional leadership] in changing the mindset. But did the Confucius Institute enhance

that? You bet." Although the Confucius Institute remained one portion of the

internationalization efforts at ARU, its reach into the local community and impact on the

diversification and cultural engagement of the area was, perhaps, even more successful

than its campus presence. A student involved with the Confucius Institute had this to say

about their experience as a community member affiliated with the Institute and their

experience gaining fluency in Mandarin Chinese:

> I just had a lot of mentors through the Confucius Institute, every single one of my
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> Chinese teachers, even the friends that I've had, they've all been really
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> encouraging and helping me learn Chinese, and they have all helped me to get
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> over my fear of making mistakes. think that's also something that has really
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> helped me is their willingness to help me learn.

For ARU, I found that internationalization was already present, active, and growing on

campus prior to the beginning of the Confucius Institute. Additionally, other factors, such

as leadership and financial motivators to increase enrollment, had previously created a

push to grow internationalization—with an emphasis on international enrollment.

Participants generally described the Confucius Institute as a tool for overall

internationalization efforts, and not one that was considered any important than another.

A cabinet-level leader described how the Confucius Institute was one part of a larger

approach in this way:

> Actually, from my perspective, I don't think so [Confucius Institute as primary
>
> driver]. We have two plus two and three plus one programs in China unrelated to
>
> the Confucius Institute. And we have students from more than 60 countries—
>
> China was just one of them, although they were the largest number. It's just one
>
> piece of everything [else we're doing related to internationalization].

The findings here allude to the Confucius Institute being a symbiotic member of the

internationalization toolkit and strategy at ARU and was one that received support—both

in the form of capital and from institutional leadership—to contribute broadly. However,

the Confucius Institute represented a portion of the larger strategy, and certainly received

support at the institutional level regarding staffing, space, and finances. In the aggregate,

however, more funds and resources were dedicated to the overall internationalization

office/staff, recruitment of international students, and education abroad programs as

opposed to the Confucius Institute. As such, it was not generally referenced as a driving

factor of institutional internationalization at ARU.

State-Level Politics and Context

The state-level factors affecting higher education for ARU are important

considerations to highlight within the larger context of higher education support and

governance. Although specific contextual level factors are omitted here to preserve the

anonymity of the institution, there are important considerations and growth motivators that ultimately have some connection points to institutional level internationalization decisions and understanding through a financial lens. A cabinet-level participant summarized the state-level support of higher education for ARU:

> That's a generous gift in my mind [state level support for higher education] based on what I've heard from a lot of colleagues across the country that more and more legislatures are choosing to reduce their funding to colleges and universities, and more of it [revenue/operating expenses] is coming through tuition. [State] has had a great commitment to higher education and continues to have a solid commitment. So, half of our funding comes from taxpayer dollars, half from tuition, and that's been consistent for [years] that I've been here. We use an incremental budgeting process, so we're not doing a zero base, we're not going back and mandating everybody justify every expense. Basically, once funding is built into somebody's base budget, then it's there unless we go drilling down in to look at, do you still need those dollars?

As an institution, ARU has had a positive relationship with the state legislature, receiving high levels of funding for their academic programs. This support also enabled the institution to keep tuition prices at reasonable levels for students. A cabinet-level leader described ARU's relationship with the state system and legislature as healthy, positive, and productive:

> I think our relationship [with the state] is healthy. I think it's candid. I think we are respected as an institution. . . . We're a little bit out of sight, out of mind. . . . So, I think we have a healthy relationship, particularly with leadership and those

committees with which we work now. Do we have a close relationship with all [legislators]? No, because I only need three committees, right? So, they'll work smarter, not harder. So those are the three committees that we work with. But I think that anyone on those committees would comfortably call and work with us.

One of the particularly interesting aspects of the connection between ARU and its physical location is what a cabinet-level described as "the reddest part of a red state." Yet, there remains support for those of other backgrounds, learning about other people and cultures, and supporting programs in the K–12 schools like dual immersion programs and the state-level support for higher education. As an outsider, I sought to further understand this relationship and context. Some participants, like a cabinet-level leader, referenced the changing demographics of the area, many of which were brought upon by mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic—forecasting potential challenges with local identity as new community members join the area. For others, like a separate cabinet level leader, it was due to a delicate balance and respect for all persons, regardless of political affiliation or belief:

I also think that there is a desire [politically] to do the right thing for the right reason. We've got people in leadership—I think there is truly respect from the majority party for the minority party. It's I think they work for bipartisan solutions as long as those are mindful of the general values of the state and also fiscal responsibility.

Throughout interviews, participants noted the benefit that ARU has had from a positive working relationship with the state legislature and policymakers. With higher education continuing to be a priority for the state and state level support not wavering, the support

of higher education has remained steady or grown in recent years—which is not the case for all states. The same shared sociocultural values which support higher education have also supported internationalization at both the secondary and postsecondary levels, as policymakers understand and recognize the importance of a global perspective in the education sector. The cultural importance of higher education and continued learning to the state and its economic development is an important consideration that helps provide additional context to understand how state level support has impacted ARU and its growth.

Finances and Internationalization at ARU

With roots in academic capitalism and the ideas of neoliberalism, a commonly cited motivating factor across the literature for institutions to engage in internationalization is the financial benefit along with rankings and prestige. I sought to further understand the role that institutional finance played within the overall internationalization context at ARU based on its prevalence throughout the literature. At ARU, financial incentives arose as a secondary concern when discussing internationalization; finances were never mentioned as a top-of-mind motivating factor during any of the interviews. When mentioned, it was more salient for cabinet-level administrators. For other institutional leaders, they seemed to reference financial benefits as a secondary factor or in the sense of a positive externality from internationalization. Contextually, a cabinet-level leader noted that "the money piece is there, since international students pay out of state tuition." However, this participant also noted that the institution generally funds more scholarships for non-international students than revenue dollars brought in by international students. In the same vein, a separate cabinet-

level leader noted that far more money is spent on the budget to recruit international students than is brought in through international student enrollment and tuition dollars. In sum, I found that finances were not a main motivating factor for ARU to pursue internationalization, in contradiction to the predominant motivating factors identified through the literature and conceptual framework of this study.

To begin, I sought to understand how finances drove an overall understanding of internationalization. Much like the definition of internationalization changing with the positionality of the participants within this study, the saliency of financial motivators seemed to shift also depending on positionality. A staff member recognized this sentiment in their interview:

> The other thing that a lot of people focus on, and I don't like it, but it does motivate people, and that is when it comes to enrollment, the revenue the international students bring in is significant. So, before the pandemic, six percent of our population was international, but 15 percent of the tuition revenue came from international students. So about three times, you know, to have a small population bring in 15 percent. That's pretty significant. And that and a lot of ways subsidizes costs for the university. I don't like that because at monetizes students. But the reality is for administrators, that's motivating.

There exists an important nuance in understanding the connection of financial benefits to internationalization at ARU. With differences based on positionality and job function, the attitude of respondents generally noted the positive financial aspects of enrolling international students but was not a focal point, or main identified motivating factor for most participants. This perception was supported by a cabinet-level leader, who noted:

> [International student enrollment] does generate a little bit extra revenue for
> the institution, but that has continually been the portion that's extra above in-state
> tuition has continually been chipped away. I worry that we're doing so much
> scholarship-ing of out-of-state students. At some point we've got to say there has
> to be a hard line in the sand and we're not scholarship-ing beyond "X" dollars so
> that it continues to fund the model that we've built.

A cabinet level administrator, then went on to answer the following then asked directly if
financial gain was a main driver for internationalization at ARU:

> No. As I said at the beginning, it certainly generates more dollars per student than
> in-state students. But the vast majority of our students are in-state students.
> [Institutional leadership] issued a challenge that they'd love us to get to 10
> percent [international enrollment], and I think we were doing well at getting
> towards that number until COVID hit. . . . More of my effort is spent convincing
> my colleagues to not give away the store. So, let's be cautious about how many
> scholarships were awarded for international or out-of-state students so that we're
> not we're not losing that revenue, which has been built into our base budget. But
> it's not a primary driver. Certainly, everybody recognizes that's added revenue.
> The conversation that I have been involved in and our campus year after year after
> year after year is we need more a more diverse student body.

For those with broader scope in institutional responsibility and a fuller picture of
institutional financial solvency, the tuition fees for international students did present as a
more salient motivating factor; this sentiment was also noted by a cabinet-level leader,
who stated that the saliency of financial motivators "largely depends on who you talk to."

They went on to mention the cabinet-level discussions of tuition revenue from international students:

> I think a lot of the conversations at the cabinet level focus on revenue generation from international students, and that's an important piece of why we do what we do. . . . Yeah, from my viewpoint on things are the financial model, the institution has to be sound, but it has to fund the priorities and institution.

Notably, the two perspectives above seem to be in contradiction to each other, particularly as it relates to funding as a driver for internationalization at ARU. A cabinet-level institutional leader, perhaps sums up this contradiction and approach that permeates across various administrators at ARU:

> Helping [international students] have a positive experience is much more expensive, although they pay a higher tuition rate. So, I don't think it's worth doing for the money. I think it's worth going through the educational experience, but it did have its financial benefits as well.

The juxtaposition between those who more readily identify the financial benefits of international student enrollment versus those who view it as more of a positive externality was interesting to uncover throughout interviews. Much of this difference in perception can likely be attributed to personal belief and connection points to internationalization, based on information gathered through interviews. Additionally, as other participants noted, the cost of engaging in internationalization is not offset entirely by the gains in tuition dollars, meaning while it may provide financial support to the institution, it is not something viewed largely as profitable. Institutional leadership at ARU certainly did not view international students as a "cash cow" (Cantwell, 2015)

within their larger budget and finance model. Although the review of the literature

pointed often to finances being a motivating factor for institutions, in the case of ARU

and this public regional institution, they were not a driving force—even with

internationalization's roots in an inherently financial and neoliberal theoretical

framework.

Returning to the positive relationship between ARU and the state legislature,

ARU certainly has financial incentives to internationalize. With the leadership's intention

to continue growing the student body combined with state factors which reward growth,

this context further allowed internationalization to thrive. Beyond base state-level support

for ARU's operating expenses and budget, the state legislature offers several incentives-

based formulas, providing institutions within the state system additional dollars for

student growth, student retention, and diversification of the student body—all of which

can be achieved by increased student mobility and international student enrollment at

ARU, and are key targets for ARU's leadership. As described by a cabinet-level leader:

> If institutions have had a tremendous amount of enrollment growth, there is a
>
> formula-based process of the [state system office]. They'll go ask the legislature
>
> for, you know, five million bucks and then they plug that into the formula. And
>
> then there's a performance-based funding mechanism. And that's based on
>
> performance, as the name suggests. And that's completion, graduation rates,
>
> retention rates. Those all get blended together.

This incentive funding has been an important part of ARU's recent growth, with a

combination of state funding and international student tuition dollars representing an

important part of the overall ARU budget. Even though one cabinet level participant

noted the cost to recruit international student outweighs the total net tuition revenue, the benefit to the institution is still clear. Even with the prevalence of incentive-based growth funding, the main purpose of internationalization at ARU was the benefit to the campus and local community along with the student experience. The financial incentives, when mentioned, were referred to as a positive externality over a driving force for overall campus internationalization.

The sociopolitical and state-level factors all influence the environment surrounding ARU and the Confucius Institute in different ways. Within this specific case, there are several key differences that make its sociopolitical environment unique. First, under a conservative legislature and supermajority, ARU has still seen growth and investment from the state level to support the institution. Second, although finances are commonly referenced as a motivator for internationalization, this is not the case at ARU. Here, ARU's internationalization efforts stem from their institutional mission and commitment to the student experience. Third, due to its status as a public regional institution, many of the controversies of the Confucius Institute did not arrive at ARU until much later as compared to a research institution. This environment is unique and speaks to the shared community and religious values which help shape the approach to a different kind of support for higher education and understanding of the value of internationalization.

Local and Community Environment

The role of the public regional institution in higher education is often referenced in its support of the local community in which it inhabits. Throughout interviews, participants often referenced the community surrounding ARU and the mutually

beneficial and supportive relationship the two parties have. The historical context explains a part of this relationship, but further partnerships developed through internationalization efforts and the Confucius Institute assisted in fostering a deeper relationship and one that ultimately extended far beyond the campus border. In this section, I discuss the relationship between the local community and the Confucius Institute. I then broaden these findings to contextualize the local partnership with K–12 schools, supported by the Confucius Institute. I then close this section with reflections on how the relationship with the local community was one of the most key findings of this study related to understanding internationalization at ARU.

The Confucius Institute and the Local Community

The partnership between the Confucius Institute, ARU, and the local community was a recurring topic across several interviews throughout data collection. In support of the sentiment of cultural engagement across the community, a staff member identified the Confucius Institute as a key mechanism for ARU was able to engage the community with global themes, cultural exchange, and contribute to overall internationalization. This finding reinforces the role that internationalization plays as a link between ARU and the community and the Confucius Institute serving as a connection point of educational outreach and initiatives between these two entities. A staff member described this connection in this way:

> So, what it [the Confucius Institute] did is it really gave us a really powerful tool
> to engage the community more than everything else had really been geared
> towards students, faculty, and on campus. But this really gave us a tool to engage

our community. I think it's just as important to help our community globalize and to be open to a shrinking world. That was particularly powerful.

When asked about the perceived benefits to ARU and the local community for having a Confucius Institute present on campus, several were identified, including the diversification of the community, ability to provide foreign language instruction, and increased visibility to ARU's international connections and partnerships worldwide. A community member identified and described these benefits for the local community in this way:

> The main interest is it was benefiting our students. Research supports the intellectual growth of our students [who participate in dual immersion programs]. Looking specifically at the Confucius Center, I think that I think the diversity helps, especially in a community like ours, compared to a lot of communities throughout the United States. We just don't have a lot of diversity. It's awesome for kids to have that kind of exposure for our teachers to have that kind of exposure and that kind of interaction. I think it's just really helpful in and respect and appreciation for different cultures. I think that part is important. And as we've been able to go to China and visit, we see the schools, and so that's added to the diversity of our staff to have just a little bit of a mix of different cultures and languages, people, and perspectives. I think it's been really helpful. Also, the added support when our kids enter high school, we have a connection to the university for a college professor that speaks and teaches Chinese. That's an important part of the longevity of our program and the kids being able to get closer to that degree.

The idea of the Confucius Institute connecting to the overall strategy of internationalization at ARU is obvious given the detailed understanding of the perception of the purpose of the Institute across various participants in this study. When asked about these connection points, participants often mentioned the Chinese classes, community programming, and connection to the local community via the K–12 school support. These responses highlighted a disconnect between what the perception and value of the Confucius Institute was on campus versus within the community. A staff member summed up this sentiment, noting the impact that the overall institute had beyond the campus boundary and in overall cross-cultural understanding in society:

> What I wouldn't have guessed when we when we were dreaming of a Confucius Institute is the difference it would make in the community, for both young and old. It was just really interesting that impact that it had. The other thing I would add is that maybe it doesn't help our internationalization efforts, but it helps the world's efforts [towards greater cultural understanding].

The community benefits and connections with others because of the Confucius Institute was echoed by both a former faculty member and current staff member. Said the former faculty member:

> There was an explicit intent to include the community in any of their activities and events, especially the Lunar New Year in February. They would invite the community that advertise free food and then they would have entertainment. They would invite immersion students, elementary, middle school, and high school to come and participate in a musical program after. So those events were very interconnected between the Confucius Institute and the community here.

The staff member referenced the personal connections, friendships, and community connections through their experience with the Confucius Institute. While alluding to the controversies surrounding Confucius Institutes in the United States, the staff member said about their perception of the benefits of the Confucius Institute:

> For me, the Confucius Center has helped to facilitate love that I have grown to have for Chinese friends, friends that I've made in China, students who have come from China, who I've befriended. So, I have love for the culture as I know it. Some of the political and critical pieces surrounding the Confucius Centers are hard for me to reconcile a little bit. Some of those problems are larger than my own experience with the Confucius Center.

A separate staff member nodded to the importance of these campus-community relationships and impact of agility in helping ensure the Confucius Institute was successful in fulfilling its purpose and benefitting the campus and local community:

> [The Confucius Institute] was different because this this allowed us to engage the community where we thought there was a lot of interest and a lot of opportunities. I feel like that was pretty important to us from the beginning. And I go back to that agility to do something like this in our community. It's [establishing connections with the Confucius Institute] probably a lot easier than it would be in a more metropolitan area, in a bigger district or things like that. The other thing is people at least have been around long enough [to have pre-established relationships]. I know people on campus and so I could work with continuing education to offer community classes. I know who the players are in the community and on campus. . . . We were this great team—they [staff within the

Confucius Institute] came up with an idea and I could facilitate the players that

could help make it happen.

Although the relationship between campus and community is an important element of a

public regional institution, the findings situated within the context of ARU are perhaps

what makes this case distinct. There are juxtapositions and contradictions around every

corner when it comes to the parties of this relationship. In today's political climate, it is

uncommon to find such little political controversy with local community members with

the Confucius Institute, given their reputation, focus in the media, and villainization by

policymakers. Beyond the benefits for the local community members, the support of the

local schools via the Confucius Institute is a unique benefit within this community.

Local K–12 Schools and the Confucius Institute

As noted within the historical context of the case, the relationship between ARU

and the local community in which it is situated is deep, intertwined, and multifaceted.

This partnership has extended into the local K–12 school system, with various language

immersion programs offered for students. It is important to highlight the widespread

acceptance and support of these language programs, particularly in a rural location with a

relatively homogeneous population both racially, religiously, and culturally. These

programs become particularly important contextual information to understand the nature

of the case through ARU's support of dual immersion programs in the local K–12

schools. A local community member, described the dual immersion program:

The dual immersion program starts in first grade and goes through twelfth.

[Student participants'] day is divided in half. Half of the day is completely done

in the language, in Chinese [or Spanish], there without any English spoken,

typically from a native speaking Chinese [or Spanish] speaker that we hire. So,

they're completely immersed there. Their math, their science, that's all done in

Chinese [or Spanish]. And as they progress up through the grades, they become

more and more proficient in the in the process. The goal is by the time high

school, they then begin taking college classes in the language, and they're within

just a credit or two of being able to have a minor by the time they're graduated

from high school.

The support of these dual immersion programs from ARU is two-pronged: some support

through classroom instruction, and some through leading internationalization activities

which permeate into the local community and K–12 school system. Another local school

leader described their professional relationship with ARU in this way:

Our Chinese class is supported by [ARU]. That's the one that we have the

connection with the university. We have a fantastic relationship with them. We

work very closely with our university. We have different concurrent enrollment

opportunities. We're a small town. We're not very big. So, the university and

[employer] are two of the biggest are probably the two biggest employers in

[location] anyway. We work very, very closely together.

The relationship between local values and a welcoming sentiment towards

internationalization and languages has helped instill these values as a part of the

community. Because of the historical context, there is an underlying level of trust and

ability to see the goodwill and positive aspects that the institution brings to the local

community and the K–12 schools. A local community leader referenced this in their

sentiments:

And I think what it comes down to again for me is a love of education that the

community rallies around. And because of that love of education, the community

supports seeing diverse populations come into the community, whether they come

to stay permanently or come to be a student or come to give a lecture. My opinion

is that the community has always embraced difference in culture, and it's what's

allowed us to become a community that has so much cultural representation in it.

It's not just international students, it's all kinds of socio-cultural representation

that is existing here in a small rural town.

To summarize the benefits between the triangle of campus, the community and the

Confucius Institute, a staff member effectively articulated how these relationships

benefitted each other and contributed to a growing support of internationalization within

campus and the local community:

And then each year we [the Confucius Institute] would have an anniversary

celebration. It was a chance for us to report back and to update the community on

things that we were doing. . . . It was this kind of ripple effect of people in the

community getting to know our scholars from China and they were mostly very

positive interactions. It has really been beautiful to watch these friendships in the

community develop. The dual immersion programs in the elementary school and

families fall in love with the teachers and the difference that they are making in

their children's life. Their jaw would just drop at seeing kids speaking Chinese. It

would quickly dispel any concerns because they would see how effective [the

program] was. The community impact was a real change in trajectory for the

efforts that we had because that was part of our mission. We have always had

Chinese language classes and Chinese activities on campus, but we now had the

ability to engage [in a different way].

There are, of course, benefits to both the institution and the local community to be willing

embracers of internationalization in the form of dollars in the economy, tourism, and

other financial rewards (particularly for increased enrollments as mentioned previously).

However, these were generally mentioned as second-hand benefits to the cultural

diversity benefits by having an internationalized campus and community through ARU as

well as programs and initiatives within the K–12 classroom. The campus-community

connection here is what makes internationalization so successful. The time spent in

garnering community buy-in and support across university programs and services is

important; however, the focus on the overall institutional mission and goals of a public

regional institution to support the community is arguably even more important in a rural,

culturally homogeneous area.

Conclusion

As the world continues to globalize, internationalization seemingly will continue

to be a part of the higher education sector in the United States. For the public regional

institution, globalization will certainly be a part of institutional decision making as it is

impossible to avoid the necessity of preparing students to work in a global society.

However, the choice for institutions remains whether to lean in directly to

internationalization as a matter of institutional policy, practice, and decision-making, or

let it be more of a passive experience. I asked participants their thoughts on the future of

internationalization at American Regional University and the overwhelming response

was one of hope, positivity, and care to continue community involvement in the future of

internationalization. A cabinet-level leader described the future of internationalization at ARU in this manner:

> It's always an opportunity. As I said early on, our community is very passionate about who we are and where we're going. And my biggest leadership philosophy is people support what they hope to create. If we can bring our community into the beginning and have them create this vision with us of what this looks like and what they're comfortable with and where we can make it a safe and educational space for everybody, I think it's a win for the community, for the students, for internationalization, for us.

Internationalization, particularly at a public regional institution, does not come without its challenges. The importance of leadership identified through these findings remains paramount, combined with institutional agility and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances related to globalization. A faculty member identified possible areas of challenge and growth for internationalization within the next five years at ARU:

> I would say it's going to depend on leadership. That's what's going to depend on. Because if they if they don't financially support it, it'll dry up. And I can only do what is in [my area of influence]. But again, I rely on the support systems in place to have our international programs be successful. And if we get it, and [our senior leaders] do not have that as a focus and they start to shift resources other places, it won't happen.

As a nod to the importance of institutional leadership in supporting internationalization, a cabinet member referenced how institutional leadership will remain the primary driver of internationalization at ARU moving forward:

But you just don't think you can underestimate that, [the importance of leadership

for internationalization], right? I believe that a university takes on the personality

of the president. And so far as the president has a priority or personality or interest

in internationalizing curriculum, or, like internationalizing the campus, it will

happen. But if not, it will slowly fall by the wayside.

Internationalization at public regional institutions such as ARU is a multifaceted process

that must consider contexts at several levels—the institutional, the local, and the state.

What I found through data collection and analysis at ARU was a deep, embedded

commitment to internationalization thanks to leadership and the sociocultural attitude

towards welcoming other people, places, and cultures into their community. This

commitment was exercised through institutional agility, pushed along by individual

factors of internationalization that were specific to the case of ARU. These factors,

coupled with the attitude and willingness to engage in internationalization, created an

environment for internationalization to thrive at ARU.

The findings of this study show evidence of a rich, thoughtful, and supported

approach to internationalization at ARU. Even with the challenges presented by COVID-

19 to campuses and the inability to promote mobility activities for several years, the

institution—and community—have a solid partnership to walk together to address future

challenges and areas of growth for internationalization. Thinking about

internationalization and the way leaders conceptualize it at ARU necessitates an

understanding of the historical context of the institution, its connection to the community,

and the local sociocultural dynamics which create an environment welcoming to

internationalization.

The factors influencing internationalization at ARU are particularly interesting—and will be unpacked in the discussion chapter—as no mention of rankings or otherwise operating outside of their institutional mission or goals was mentioned. The Confucius Institute was considered prestigious for ARU's administration, but there was no mention of that prestige benefitting the institution in the context of mission creep. Internationalization was a home-grown desire, based on the experiences of institutional leaders and their commitment to and belief in the value of creating a globalized environment in which students, faculty, staff, and community members can learn. The role that internationalization plays at ARU certainly benefits the campus, but even more so, the local community, with ARU understanding and championing its role and influence in the community to create an interculturally diverse environment for all.

The future of internationalization at ARU will likely change given the changing attitudes towards Confucius Institutes in the United States. Although these findings did not explore the future of the Confucius Institute at ARU, it is nearly certain that many of the same challenges facing other institutes will also face ARU's institute. In a post-COVID environment of rapid change for higher education, other challenges are also likely on the horizon, ranging from financial, to changing leadership positions, to federal or state regulations that may further provide structure to international partnerships. What is certain, however, is the role that internationalization has played within ARU and its local community, radiating from an institutional belief and commitment in its value and purpose as a beacon of prosperity and growth, fulfilling the established role of the public regional institution.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study analyzed one public regional institution's understanding and perception of internationalization through the lens of its Confucius Institute on campus. In addition, this study examined the role that the Confucius Institute played in overall internationalization, highlighting the institution's perception of the Confucius Institute given myriad controversies at the federal and state levels with such institutes as of late. Data were collected to understand institutional leaders' perceptions of what internationalization is, and how it is defined, as well as motivators to internationalize. Several key themes emerged through the findings, including an understanding of how, in this case, internationalization is viewed as a part of the overall institutional mission and student experience. In addition, the findings illuminated the role that internationalization and the Confucius Institute played in the campus-community connection. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings related to the established research questions. It then returns to the conceptual framework, highlighting areas for new understanding of academic capitalism and institutional theory in the context of this case. Lastly, this chapter ends with implications for future research, for internationalization, for Confucius Institutes, and for public regional institutions of higher education in the United States.

Discussion

This study began with a historical context of the factors leading to internationalization of higher education in the U.S. with examples and motivations of

internationalization discussed from the point of view of the research university. With internationalization research focusing most commonly on the research institution and community colleges, I noted that there was a dearth of literature that understood and applied understandings and motivations of internationalization to the public regional institution. As globalization continues to permeate many aspects of modern society—politics, the economy, and otherwise—an understanding of internationalization at public regional universities is needed to contribute to the literature. To narrow the research focus, I chose a case of a public regional institution with a Confucius Institute to understand its connection to overall internationalization. I organized data collected from interviews, document analyses, and observations around three central research questions:

1. In what ways do leaders of public regional institutions define and understand internationalization?

2. How do leaders of public regional institutions describe the nature and purpose of Confucius Institutes?

3. What political, social, and economic influences shape a public regional institution's decision-making related to Confucius Institutes?

In this section, I discuss and interpret the findings related to each of the research questions. These findings are discussed under broad-level topical areas uncovered through the data analysis process.

Question 1: In what ways to leaders of public regional institutions define and understand internationalization?

Internationalization is a choice—stemming from priorities of leadership

Answering the question about what internationalization is at ARU necessitates understanding the social, political, and cultural forces that exist within its milieu. Little is known about internationalization specific to public regional institutions in the literature and applying a definition of internationalization created with the broader higher education landscape in mind may only partially fit the realities of internationalization within this case. This was the case at ARU, with the predominant definitions of internationalization stemming from overall mobility of people, both into and outside of ARU, as well as curricular offerings within the classroom.

What struck me as perhaps the most important finding under which to discuss internationalization at ARU is the notion that internationalization in this context is an active choice—a choice that is made by institutional leadership to invest in something they view as valuable. An institutional leader most eloquently stated this in their thoughts, referencing the rurality of ARU's location and the isolated nature of its location. This choice, an institutional leader contended, is something that allows ARU to become bigger than what it is—to become something more—as a common, shared value across campus. In addition, when referring to the benefits of internationalization to ARU, finances were mentioned as a positive externality of all the other benefits that come with international student enrollment. All things considered, the financial cost of international student recruitment, enrollment, and support far outweighed the financial benefit to the institution for those tuition dollars as noted across several respondents. The choice to

internationalize comes from a wide variety of perspectives, drivers, and benefits for both the campus and the local community. As such, understanding internationalization as a choice presents a new perspective of the motivations and rationales for this specific public regional institution to engage in internationalization.

Within this case, ARU defined what internationalization means for their institution at the intersection of the institutional mission, community engagement, and the student experience—three key areas of consideration that were frequently mentioned during interviews. In a way, internationalization at ARU can be viewed as a "right place, right time" phenomena with the alignment of institutional priorities, motivations to grow the student body, and the local culture and values creating an environment more welcoming to internationalization than may be expected in a conservative portion of a conservative state. Many of these factors, such as rurality and the conservative nature of the area and state, are not commonly associated with internationalization. However, the combination of leadership, resources, incentives, and cultural reception to other people, places, and cultures provided a necessary foundation over which internationalization was able to prosper.

The literature commonly references motivations such as institutional prestige, rankings, and financial factors as active drivers toward internationalization. At ARU, most of these examples (rooted from applications to research institutions), are not identified as motivating factors. Although regional institutions are often accused of mission creep in the name of progressing across various ranking metrics, the only mention of rankings or prestige at all during data collection was the prestige that came with a Confucius Institute at the time of its establishment. In total, the arguments of

prestige, rankings, and finance fell by the wayside at ARU, recognizing the benefit to the campus, community, and overall student experience.

Beyond the motivating factors identified by the literature, the most powerful factor at ARU was leadership. Institutional leaders here have their own personal connections to internationalization. This led to the recognition of internationalization's importance combined with advocacy and support of creating structures, staffing lines, programs, events, and services. With goals to increase the international proportion of student enrollment, this became a priority not only for the international office, but also for enrollment management as a directive from the executive institutional leadership. This shift was possible due to trust and support from the Board of Trustees with minimal institutional involvement. This trust allowed the institution to "fly under the radar" and not have as much attention from state level policymakers and the state governing board.

In thinking about accusations of mission creep that some scholars argue apply to public regional institutions, I found that decisions made related to internationalization at ARU were made with two main factors in mind: (1) the value and benefit to the student experience, and (2) the value and benefit to the campus and local community. Respondents recognized the importance of global learning outcomes and preparing students to work in a global society and the responsibility they had to do so, given ARU's location and lack of cultural or international diversity in the area. When asked about any perceived conflicts with the mission to engage in internationalization, respondents returned to this sense of duty to provide a student experience that was holistic, well rounded, and honored the important role that internationalization and learning from other people, places, and cultures plays in the classroom and co-curriculum.

The connection to the community was also mentioned as a reference point for internationalization. The literature on public regional institutions often references the importance that these institutions play in local economic development, providing access to local students, and meeting the diverse needs of the local community and state (Harcleroad & Ostar, 1987). For ARU, this was certainly their reality, but to another level of interconnection and symbiotic mutual support. The local context of ARU, particularly the shared cultural values related to cultural acceptance and understanding of others, was an important factor to support internationalization. Beyond that, the historical context and connection of campus to community further supports this notion of trust from both parties, assuming the benefit of the doubt and working together to support the community and the institution.

In sum, internationalization at ARU is a comprehensive process that institutional leaders have crafted to fit the needs of their institution in line with the mission, goals, and experience they seek to provide students and with which to support the local community. Often, internationalization can be considered less robust without all the components commonly referenced—mobility, research, partnerships—but internationalization at ARU is robust given its resources, leadership, location, and cultural factors. It calls into focus the need for the scholarship to highlight nuance in internationalization, particularly for institutions such as ARU that adapt the core of internationalization to fit the needs of their institution. Arguably, internationalization in this manner allows for the greater sense of agility identified throughout interviews, as ARU is not beholden to the same external pressures as research institutions. As such, internationalization takes a different form, but one that is decided upon from the lens of institutional mission and student experience.

Several factors influence internationalization, but leadership matters most

Part of defining and understanding internationalization from the perspective of leaders of public regional institutions is recognizing the factors that push internationalization forward. As the literature suggests, there are myriad influencing factors for internationalization, including rankings, prestige, financial incentives, diversifying the student body, among others. In the context of ARU, leadership remained the most important aspect of overall internationalization. As a senior leader noted, higher education institutions tend to take on the identity and priorities of their presidential and senior leadership. In the case of ARU, leadership was the primary driver for internationalization. With successive institutional leaders placing internationalization as a priority, it became a reality, particularly under the desire to increase overall student enrollment.

There are several other factors with the ecosystem of ARU and its community which contributed to internationalization. Financial motivations were not a primary driver for internationalization, but state-based incentive funding for increased enrollment and increased student body diversification helped encourage a more diversified approach to enrollment growth. For ARU, this helped promote international enrollment in tandem with other forms of outreach to contribute to enrollment growth. It is hard to say that internationalization was a consideration in this push to increase enrollment; presidential leadership had set a growth target for percentage of the enrolled student population being international. However, internationalization played a part of this overall effort and did not rise to the forefront as the primary factor of enrollment growth.

When thinking about the overall context of internationalization at ARU, the general factors that drove internationalization were leadership at the executive level. As a result of this push from leadership, ARU saw increases in student mobility (both inbound and outbound, for study abroad) and benefits through increased funding at the state level for growing enrollments. This push from leadership came from personal belief and experience with the benefits of internationalization and recognizing the value that international and global perspectives have on the student experience and overall student outcomes at ARU. Combined with the state and local cultural values of supporting the understanding of other people, places, and cultures, internationalization was able to thrive—but began with leadership understanding and communicating its value to campus through support and structures.

Internationalization, in the context of ARU, is a community effort

A major finding of this study is the deep connection between ARU and its environment that extends to nearly every aspect of the institution and the local community. The symbiotic nature of this relationship surfaced in many interviews and clearly plays a role in institutional decision-making related to internationalization. Given the polarized nature of politics today, it could be reasonably assumed that the rural location of ARU combined with the conservative sociopolitical values may have created an unwelcoming environment towards internationalization, with the introduction of those who are visibly different into the community. However, that was not the case at ARU and within the community, and the area was relatively open and willing to embrace internationalization.

ARU has a local community that embraces internationalization through many targeted and tangible ways. The dual immersion program for Spanish and Mandarin Chinese, for instance, highlights how the community was already engaging with globalization independent of ARU's influence. As an area for collaboration and support, ARU took advantage of this community support to continue growing internationalization through targeted student recruitment and the establishment of the Confucius Institute. The convergence of institutional interest combined with community support for internationalization served as another driving factor that supported internationalization to grow within this case site. This is a particularly important discussion point as the criticisms of internationalization in the public regional space often comes with a view of neglecting their role to the community. In the case of ARU, I found this criticism to be misapplied and invalid. It further bolsters the argument that criticisms of mission–creep should be re-examined for public regional institutions.

Question 2: How do leaders of public regional institutions describe the nature and purpose of Confucius Institutes?

The Confucius Institute played a cultural role on campus, but more so in the community

The Confucius Institute at ARU is a component of the overall internationalization efforts on campus that permeated into the local community. Most participants offered a general definition and understanding of the Confucius Institute in line with its espoused cultural and educational mission. Participants referenced the contributions it made to campus in the form of language education and cultural programming, noting that many of the Confucius Institute's events were some of the largest that took place each year.

Beyond the campus level, I found that the greatest impact of the Confucius Institute arguably was in the local community through its educational and outreach efforts, including support for the dual-immersion language programs in the local school system. A takeaway I had from the overall perception of the Confucius Institute was that it was a means to achieving a goal. While its presence was important, internationalization was not about the Confucius Institute but the larger product and goal of an overall strategy and belief in the importance that internationalization brought to campus.

The literature examining Confucius Institutes references the role that soft power and cultural diplomacy play in their overall missions and goals, to promote a more positive view of China and the Chinese government. The Confucius Institute at ARU accomplished these goals through its educational and outreach efforts, but participants in this study noted that they never felt pressured or otherwise "indoctrinated" by Confucius Institute programming. While it is impossible to say if there were ulterior motives on behalf of the Confucius Institute at ARU, what is clear is the mutual benefit received by ARU, the local community, and participants in Confucius Institute programming in creating opportunities for increased cultural diplomacy and cross-cultural connections.

The ARU context created a system of mutually beneficial relationships between the Confucius Institute and the local community, bolstered by the local sociocultural values underpinning a welcoming environment for internationalization and global engagement. Given the conservative nature of the area, it would have not been at all surprising for the community to be unwelcoming toward any pro-China programming or events with the narrative of China permeating political discourse. The result for a successful Confucius Institute in the context of ARU stemmed from three major factors:

(1) trust in the institution to do things in the best interest of ARU and the community, mutually; (2) leadership who could communicate the value of internationalization, and the Confucius Institute, to the local community; and (3) a community grounded in values of welcoming and learning from those of other cultures. Taken together, these combined to form the environment under which the Confucius Institute at ARU dodged controversy on the local level; while it may not have been always viewed positively, it was not a major point of negativity or controversy in the community.

Confucius Institutes broadly were controversial, but controversies were misapplied at ARU

The controversies surrounding Confucius Institutes at the federal level are no secret—policymakers have made concerted efforts to block higher education institutions from receiving funding from foreign sources, including China, to close Confucius Institutes altogether in the United States. At ARU, most participants were aware of the controversies surrounding Confucius Institutes; most became so once they became a fixture in the national news cycle under the Trump administration. A few participants noted their first recollection of these controversies coming around the time of COVID-19, with a rise of anti-Asian sentiment resulting from the origination of the coronavirus in Wuhan. While the controversies slowly became more palpable, they were taken with a grain of salt and kept at arm's length at ARU, with the sentiment that they did not apply to the Confucius Institute at ARU.

What became evident through data analysis was a misapplication of the overall arguments underpinning controversies with Confucius Institutes. The larger national discourse calling for elimination of Confucius Institutes has been one of national security,

with fears of espionage and theft of American defense research or other concerns of national security. This argument was never widely accepted by ARU's administration, given their public regional status and lack of research at the federal level. As one participant rhetorically asked, "What is there to steal?", further bolstering the rationale that Confucius Institutes in the context of public regional institutions may be misunderstood. While there are certainly valid criticisms of Confucius Institutes at the federal level, I found in the case of ARU that the institute itself operated in line with its espoused goals and contributed to a positive environment of cultural diplomacy and understanding.

The Confucius Institute participated in internationalization, but was not a motivating factor

Internationalization at ARU was a toolkit that contains several strategic actions that further promote global engagement and international activity on behalf of the institution. Given the prestigious nature of Confucius Institutes and their location, gaining a Confucius Institute at ARU was undoubtedly a contributor to overall internationalization. However, the Confucius Institute served as a tool within this larger toolkit of internationalization—and had little to no impact on Chinese student enrollment, according to participants. This perspective offers a different understanding to the long-standing argument that Confucius Institutes draw increased numbers of Chinese students and revenue to institutions. While that may be the case at other institutions, ARU generally viewed the Confucius Institute as a part of a larger strategy that was already built and established prior to gaining the Confucius Institute on campus.

Because of the Confucius Institute's role as a contributor and not a driver of internationalization, the question of closure due to controversy was palpable but not of catastrophic concern to participants. Structuring internationalization as a diversified investment portfolio would allow for internationalization to continue its prosperity even if the Institute itself is required to close due to federal and/or state regulation. This overall approach further contextualizes the case at ARU, understanding how the other dominant factors to drive internationalization led to the establishment of a Confucius Institute to supplement and complement good work that was already being done on campus. As such, the Confucius Institute itself was not a "silver bullet" to achieve internationalization in the public regional context. Based on the context at ARU, it is unlikely that the Confucius Institute itself could have been successful without the work that took place to situate internationalization as a priority prior to its establishment on campus.

Question 3: What political, social, and economic influences shape a public regional institution's decision-making related to Confucius Institutes?

One of the most important findings of this study relates to this research question at the intersection of Confucius Institute decision-making and institutional mission and goals. My assumption as a researcher was that any institution would be concerned about the threats facing Confucius Institutes from the federal level and various state legislatures. In this case, there certainly was concern, but there was a lack of understanding as to how those concerns applied within the public regional context. As a result, much of the advocacy for the Confucius Institute at ARU came from leaders explaining the nature and purpose in addition to the misalignment of the arguments of national security in this specific context. To advocate for the Confucius Institute, the

institutional mission of ARU served as the linchpin—where, because there were no national security concerns at ARU, they were able to advocate for the Institute under its mission and purpose to campus and the community.

Even with the considerations of sociopolitical and economic influences of the Confucius Institute at ARU, perhaps the phrase "decision-making" is incorrect given the findings. What this study revealed was not a direct path to decision-making, but one of advocacy for the institution's goals of internationalization. There were little sociopolitical concerns within the institution and the community, and those brought from the state and federal levels never directly correlated with the reality at ARU. Beyond that, the economic concerns communicated from participants stemmed over the need to fulfill the agreement with the Confucius Institute. All things considered, what I found was a buffer that existed between the sociopolitical and economic influences of Confucius Institute decision-making. This buffer created a sense of stability for the Confucius Institute at ARU, further bolstered by the support of the institution and local community. While the future of the Confucius Institute at ARU cannot be mentioned to
maintain anonymity in the case, the institution's main goal is to be able to keep progressing forward with its internationalization goals—with or without the Confucius Institute in its current form.

Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was built around the theories of academic capitalism and institutional theory. As a reminder, academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) seeks to explain how institutions engage in the global marketplace. It is a concept underpinned by globalization and the

forces of neoliberalism within the U.S. higher education sector. Institutional theory broadly examines environments of change and how organizations shift and change under pressure (Dacin et. al., 2002). Complementary to institutional theory is institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), highlighting the way institutions often take homogeneous forms of each other when faced with similar environmental conditions. While these theoretical frameworks helped guide the creation and understanding of this study, the data and findings call for revisiting and contextualizing how examples of these different theories appeared and applied within this case site.

Academic capitalism

Internationalization, at its core, is inextricably connected to academic capitalism. Given that globalization itself contributed to the neoliberal movement in higher education—resulting in institutions responding via internationalization to global forces and pressures—it is difficult to separate these two factors from each other. However, common examples of academic capitalism in the academy extend far beyond forces like internationalization and view how institutions actively engage in the global marketplace of ideas, competition, rankings, prestige, and resource diversification. Academic capitalism did explain the overall push towards internationalization at ARU, but it lost steam as a key driver of internationalization.

Because ARU is a public regional institution, academic capitalism inherently will operate differently on its campus, given the teaching focus and absence of global research opportunities and partnerships. The most common examples of "market-like behavior" related to internationalization was the recruitment of international students to attend ARU. Even then, several participants identified the cost of recruitment and enrollment

was greater than the actual aggregate tuition dollars received via international student enrollment. The common understanding of academic capitalism is that there is inherent pressure on behalf of the institution to engage in these market-like behaviors. However, the findings at ARU push back on this statement; the only pressure to engage in internationalization came from the view of its value at the top levels of leadership and its connection to the overall student experience.

Many of the other market forces that would encourage an institution to pursue internationalization were perhaps offset due to the environment surrounding ARU. The clearest example of this is state-level funding provided for increased recruitment and enrollment efforts, in which ARU undertook increased recruitment of diverse and international student populations. Certainly, increased enrollment helps support the institution; however, the institution would have likely engaged in many of these efforts anyway due to their status as an institutional priority. These funds were not directly connected with internationalization, but on increased enrollment and diversification of students. Combined with institutional leadership's focus on internationalization, international student recruitment assisted in meeting these metrics.

The findings in this study suggest that academic capitalism is an undercurrent that frames internationalization for the U.S. higher education sector. However, there is a great amount of nuance that exists in the idea of academic capitalism that the literature and theoretical approach of this study neglected to identify. The idea of globalization and academic capitalism implicitly assumes that there is a financial motivation for internationalization, which may be true in certain cases. At ARU, there was a gray area in between that academic capitalism offers an incomplete explanation of internationalization

and overlooks important nuance that is an overarching theme for public regional institutions in the higher education literature.

Institutional theory and institutional isomorphism

Internationalization is an external force which prompts some form of internal change, adaptation, or evolution within higher education institutions. Inherently, internationalization requires this—as a process of change management in response to the external force of globalization. At ARU, the movement to manage this change was a choice, as previously discussed, and the analysis from this study would suggest that public regional institutions experience the forces of internationalization change management differently based on leadership priorities, location, and sociopolitical context. Because internationalization at ARU is an active choice, the campus was in tune with the need to make it a priority as an initiative from senior leadership. This environment supported the movement towards institutional agility, first mentioned by an institutional leader as a benefit of addressing internationalization in the public regional space. Because of its size and institutional support combined with not having motivators like prestige-seeking or rankings, ARU adapted this agile approach to adopting internationalization, arguably making it more successful within this context.

In thinking about this study, I approached my conceptualization of internationalization at public regional institutions as one of institutional isomorphism— essentially, regional public institutions seeing success for international activity at research universities or community colleges and adapting many of those to fit the needs of the context of the regional public institution. However, what I found through this study is that internationalization is defined by the institution itself, and ARU chose to

internationalize in the way that it has due to the factors unique to the institution. To connect institutional isomorphism directly to ARU's internationalization would be to ignore the specific factors driving internationalization at ARU. As such, while institutional isomorphism certainly influences the ways institutions internationalize—e.g., study abroad, student recruitment—the methods by which these goals are accomplished in the case of ARU are individual to the institution. The idea of institutional isomorphism at ARU did not follow what I assumed would be a blueprint of internationalization from research institutions. Internationalization as a concept applies across the board to all institutions of higher education that choose to engage actively in a global environment. However, for this public regional institution, there was no choice to follow a template of a research institution or engage in isomorphic behavior to garner the same success or emulate a research institution. The choice was ARU's alone, and they made internationalization what it needed to be in the context of their environment and the students they serve.

Implications

A major strength of case study research is the reliance on and access to thick description (Merriam, 1998) and ability to understand the nuance, context, and importance of the relationship of the phenomena to the selected site. Although case study research is not meant to be generalizable, there are several key implications that arose from this study and its contributions to the literature on internationalization, public regional institutions, and Confucius Institutes. In this final section, I will discuss the implications for the three major areas of this study: internationalization of higher

education, Confucius Institutes, and public regional institutions of higher education.

Within each section, implications for research, policy, and practice are included.

For internationalization of higher education

A central goal of this study was to define and understand internationalization from

the perspective of leaders at public regional institutions. What arose from these

definitions were threefold: (1) a focus on mobility as a key metric of internationalization;

(2) the emphasis on internationalization, broadly, being a part of the student experience,

both through the utility of mobility and overall learning and career outcomes; and (3) the

impact and importance of internationalization within the community context. The

definition of internationalization offered at the start of this study—as a response in the

form of policy and practice, to an external force like globalization—is open ended in its

language and leaves room for institutional interpretation. However, as

internationalization has become more prevalent in higher education, the key tenants of

internationalization have often been defined by the successes and metrics of research

universities. Moving forward, higher education needs to not only recognize but also

validate that comprehensive internationalization takes shape within the context of the

institution internationalizing, placing value on the contributions of public regional

institutions.

What the common definitions, conceptual models, or resources for practitioners in

internationalization exclude or deemphasize is the need to practice internationalization

within the institutional context. Internationalization will take different forms on different

campuses based on various institutional factors, including institutional mission,

leadership, governance structures, rurality, and resources, among others. For the case of

ARU, factors like international research collaborations or faculty exchange were much less prevalent due to the overall structure and goal of the institution. The findings in this case call for an increased need to not only understand internationalization in different institutional contexts, but to also step back and reimagine how we as a field discuss internationalization, making space for other paths and means outside of those dominated by the research institution discourse. In addition, this study uncovered the connection of internationalization to the student experience within the public regional institution context. Further research is needed to understand the relationship of internationalization on the student experience, especially in rural contexts where students may not have otherwise ever experienced another place or person from another culture.

Internationalization is driven by different prioritizing factors as indicated throughout these findings. The commonly cited factors for internationalization that apply to research institutions, such as rankings and prestige, did not apply in the case of ARU. I further discuss implications for public regional institutions later in this section; however, what these findings imply is an increased need to understand what the motivating factors are for internationalization within institutional types outside of the dominant research institution paradigm of internationalization. The findings in this case suggest a need to further research the commonly referenced financial motivator for internationalizing in this context and calls into question the idea that institutions—particularly public regional institutions—only internationalize for the revenue diversification. The exercise of applying these factors and motivators generally reserved for research institutions into this space is challenging at best and leads to misunderstanding and misapplication of such

motivators. More research is needed to enrich the literature on the experience and motivating factors of internationalization at public regional institutions.

Another key implication for internationalization is the importance of leadership to drive internationalization. Even with its recognized importance, no institutional leaders ever mentioned receiving formal training related to internationalizing the campus at ARU. I believe that with a changing understanding of internationalization and more research in the public regional institution arena, more theory to practice and practical applications of internationalization training and resources are needed in this area. Even in writing this dissertation, the field's understanding of internationalization at public regional institutions is so limited that it would be challenging for an institutional leader to look at the body of knowledge in this area and feel that their institution is understood and represented. Relying on personal experience has been a catalyst for internationalization at ARU but may not be the case in other public regional contexts. A broader understanding of the motivations, drivers, and practical considerations for internationalization at public regional institutions is needed that can then be translated into effective practice for campus-level leaders and decision-makers.

For Confucius Institutes

Discussing implications for Confucius Institutes is a complicated matter, given the uncertainty of their overall future presence in the United States. To this day, there continues to be interest at both the state and federal levels for increased oversight of colleges and universities receiving foreign funding and concerns over the implications of national security and research integrity for institutions employing foreign scholars. Regardless of the controversies related to foreign funding, and by extension, Confucius

Institutes, the case at ARU calls into question the binary under which Confucius Institutes are presented in the United States. Confucius Institutes, much like other complicated and controversial issues in higher education, must be examined with nuance, contextualizing the political discourse in tandem with their espoused goals and missions. This nuance becomes even more palpable when thinking about the closure of Confucius Institutes nationally and how this discourse impacts an entire group of students and scholars in the United States. It is necessary for policymakers to remember and recognize that not all Chinese students or scholars are affiliated with Confucius Institutes, and the current language used to vilify these organizations can lead to real and present concerns for those of Chinese nationality on U.S. campuses.

At the start of this study, I made the claim that this study will not make any sort of judgment on the validity, political implications, or wade into the controversy of Confucius Institutes—that was not the point of this research. What this research did reveal, and calls for further understanding and implications moving forward, is the presence of foreign diplomacy programs such as Confucius Institutes within the public regional environment. The arguments against Confucius Institutes in the context of ARU do not hold the same weight as they may for other types of institutions. This goes back to the overall understanding and contextualization of internationalization within this environment. The lack of understanding and inability to understand the differences in internationalization and purpose of the Confucius Institute within the ARU environment ultimately is a symptom of a larger need for increased understanding of the nuance of internationalization. At the core, the experience of the Confucius Institute at ARU

emphasizes the importance and power of this cross-cultural learning and how higher education is a form of international diplomacy.

The main implication for Confucius Institutes because of this study is that even with the challenges and controversies from policymakers, there are also inherent benefits to these cultural exchange institutes. Putting aside the contractual issues, concerns of espionage and national security, concerns of propagandizing in the classroom, and the implications from the China Initiative through the Department of Justice, ARU and the community surrounding it benefitted from the cultural exchange provided by the Confucius Institute. A community member noted that while they believed the intentions of the Institute at ARU may be devious, that was never their experience through the programs and services provided. The same experience was mentioned by a former student who traveled to China with the ARU Confucius Institute.

The larger story of Confucius Institutes is far more complicated than just citing a national security threat, and when the politics begin to enter the conversation, it impacts the people on campuses trying to honor the importance of intercultural learning and experiences. There are also real and tangible benefits that the institution received from its presence, complicating the narrative that Confucius Institutes are inherently negative, deceptive entities in higher education. This gray area of Confucius Institutes was highlighted in a recent report by Stanford University which found that Confucius Institute staff generally receive little political training and have minimal oversight but often shy away from controversial topics (Stanford University, 2022). This nuance suggests that Confucius Institute staff are not foreign agents as many critics have charged, but still may follow the party line. Regardless of the challenges that this study also suggests, it does

call on a more thoughtful approach to understanding Confucius Institutes and recognizing that there is space for benefits of such partnerships even through the challenges.

For public regional institutions

Arguably, the greatest implications from this study arise from ARU's ability to navigate internationalization in a way that remains true to the institutional mission and scope of a public regional institution. The criticisms for public regional institutions are many, with accusations of mission creep regularly leveled at institutions that are often underfunded for the large proportion of the responsibility of education they take on. The case of ARU argues that public regional institutions do not have to abide by exclusively a "think local" playbook, and that an institution can simultaneously internationalize while also maintaining a dedication to its mission and local roots. What became clear through these findings was that if ARU had focused more locally, and foregone internationalization, the impact on the student experience, growth opportunities for the institution itself, and cultural engagement and internationalization opportunities for the community would have been fewer and further between.

The context of ARU also highlighted the role that internationalization in this case played in overall cultural diplomacy and cross-cultural learning within the community space. The mission of regional institutions often encompasses the role they play in the community, and the internationalization efforts at ARU contributed positively to the local area. This form of cultural diplomacy is little-studied and offers a new venue for future research in how such institutions can play a catalytic role in internationalizing campuses and the communities in which they are located. While this is unique to the context of ARU, I argue that it does not have to be, and more research is needed to understand the

connection points and how higher education institutions contribute to internationalization particularly in rural communities. Additionally, there is something to be learned from how ARU has made this a reality with their intentional efforts to create and support a welcoming environment for internationalization in areas that would otherwise be overlooked for internationalization initiatives and activity.

The final main implication I found in this study is the importance of institutional agility within the context of public regional institutions to create and execute policies and practices to meet a goal, leadership directive, or service connected to the student experience. Change in higher education is viewed as cumbersome and lethargic. However, the case of ARU highlights how institutional agility, coming from a leadership push, was a key factor in achieving internationalization within the institution. There is space for further understanding the connection of institutional agility at the public regional institution level to make space for internationalization. I would also argue that some of the actions taken by ARU resulting from agility and further promoting internationalization could be lessons to further inform how other institutional types may approach their own unique internationalization approaches.

When I think about the overall context of this study and what I as a researcher have learned, I return to Orphan's (2020) assertion that the argument of mission creep and prestige-seeking behavior is often misapplied to the public regional institution space. In the context of ARU, that is undoubtedly the case. Every decision made related to internationalization, or the Confucius Institute, was made with the institution, community, and student experience in mind, keeping at the forefront a deep understanding of the role that ARU plays in supporting the local community. Orphan's

(2020) article noted that "A dominant narrative exists that all regional public universities (RPUs) are striving for prestige and, if given the chance, would readily abandon their missions of facilitating educational access for marginalized students and increase admissions selectivity to privilege elite students. As a result, RPUs are largely depicted as being unsure of and uncommitted to their missions" (p. 9). I disagree with this narrative and found that at ARU, the exact opposite is true—the institution is committed and very sure of its mission, as well as the connection of internationalization to its mission and purpose, a finding in line with Orphan's (2020) assertion against such a narrative. These findings show how an institution can simultaneously live globally while also acting locally, in the name of the student experience and value to the local community and maintaining a steadfast commitment to the role it plays in the overall higher education sector.

This study is one small contribution to what is a limited body of knowledge of internationalization at public regional institutions of higher education. I hope that these findings call on higher education researchers to not limit their thinking to internationalization as only an activity engaged in by research institutions, and for reasons that only benefit the institution. When the chase for prestige, rankings, and financial motivators are taken out of the equation, as they largely were in the case of ARU, it allowed internationalization to flourish in its own organic way and taking the shape of how it would best benefit multiple stakeholders within the process. The findings of this study allow us as a field to consider internationalization in pursuit of mission instead of in opposition; the value added to campus and community; and finally, the

power of institutional leadership to shape the future of internationalization within the public regional institutional context.

This study showed how regional institutions can effectively internationalize, and their motivations for doing so do not have to be funding-based. It also exposed that the glaring deficit of research on internationalization at public regional institutions is mischaracterizing the case of ARU, leaving it to be defined by the understanding of internationalization through a lens not their own. Beyond this, public regional institutions bring their own unique take on internationalization that, at least in the case of ARU, was not steeped in in isomorphic behavior. We can use academic capitalism and institutional isomorphism as guideposts for understanding internationalization, but the road traveled by public regional institutions is paved with far greater nuance and context than these theoretical approaches indicate. As international education as a field continues to evolve and adapt after the challenges of the past few years, we must expand what internationalization means and include the public regional institution in the conversation as key contributors to internationalization across the higher education sector.

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APPENDIX A

IRB EXEMPTION LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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Human Research Protection Program

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

March 26, 2022

Dear Timothy Cain:

On 3/26/2022, the Human Subjects Office reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	Understanding Internationalization through Confucius Institutes at Public Regional Institutions of Higher Education
Investigator:	Timothy Cain
Co-Investigator:	Benjamin Cecil
IRB ID:	PROJECT00004980
Funding:	None
Review Category:	Exempt 2ii

We have determined that the proposed research is Exempt. The research activities may begin 3/26/2022. The PI is responsible for ensuring that all activities and materials are compliant with the following policies: Internet Research, Participant Selection and Recruitment, and Use of External Sites in Research. Also the consent process must include the elements in Appendix B of the Exempt Review policy

Since this study was determined to be exempt, please be aware that not all future modifications will require review by the IRB. For more information please see Appendix C of the Exempt Research Policy (https://research.uga.edu/docs/policies/compliance/hso/IRB-Exempt-Review.pdf). As noted in Section C.2., you can simply notify us of modifications that will not require review via the "Add Public Comment" activity.

A progress report will be requested prior to 3/26/2027. Before or within 30 days of the progress report due date, please submit a progress report or study closure request. Submit a progress report by navigating to the active study and selecting Progress Report. The study may be closed by selecting Create Version and choosing Close Study as the submission purpose.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

Kimberly Fowler, Director
Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear <<Participant Name>>,

My name is Ben Cecil, and I am a PhD candidate in the Louise McBee Institute of Higher Education at the University of Georgia. I am conducting my dissertation research under the direction of Dr. Timothy Cain and am contacting you with an invitation to participate in my research study which seeks to understand the nature of internationalization at public regional institutions of higher education through the perspective of Confucius Institutes.

My study has been approved by the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board and is supported by [name] at [institution].

I am inviting you to participate in a 60-minute interview to understand your perspective of internationalization at [institution] and of [institution's] Confucius Institute. Your interview will be recorded and can take place via Zoom or in person during the week of April 11 – 15, 2022. Your participation in this study will be kept anonymous; you will be assigned a pseudonym and not identified by your position title. Additionally, [institution] will be kept anonymous and not identified by any characteristics directly linked to the institution.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns related to this research project. Many thanks for your consideration and I hope to hear from you soon.

All the best,
Ben

Benjamin G. Cecil, M.S.
Ph.D. Candidate – Louise McBee Institute of Higher Education
University of Georgia
bgcecil@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

EXAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Part 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of internationalization at public

regional institutions of higher education through the presence of Confucius Institutes.

Your confidentiality will be maintained in this interview; your name and the name of

anyone you mention as a part of your responses will be assigned a pseudonym. Your role

will be referred to in a general sense (i.e., Chief Academic Officer) and your institution

will be kept anonymous. There are no perceived risks to your participation and benefits

may include your assistance in the completion of my dissertation and doctoral degree.

This transcript will be video recorded through Zoom / audio recorded if in person and

stored on a secured drive following transcription. The transcription will only be shared

with my major professor and dissertation committee for the purposes of my dissertation

only. You have the right to withdraw at any time from this interview process. Do you

have any questions about anything I have just stated?

Part 2: Interview Questions

1. Topic 1: Background

   a. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your role at the institution or

      relationship to the institution/Confucius Institute.

2. Topic 2: Internationalization at Public Regional Institutions

   a. How do you define internationalization as it relates to higher education?

   b. What is your perception of internationalization at your campus today?

   c. How does internationalization connect with your institution's goals and strategic vision?

   d. How do you believe the landscape of internationalization may differ for public regional institutions as compared to other institutional types?

3. Topic 3: Confucius Institutes

   a. How would you define the nature and purpose of Confucius Institutes?

   b. What impacts, if any, have you noticed with the presence of the Confucius Institute?

   c. What role does the Confucius Institute play in overall internationalization efforts?

   d. How does the Confucius Institute connect to your institution's long-term goals and strategic vision?

4. Topic 4: Geopolitics and Decision Making with Confucius Institutes and Internationalization

   a. Describe how you perceive a closure of the Confucius Institute impacting the campus community.

   b. Has the presence of a Confucius Institute generated any challenges between the institution and other stakeholders?

   c. What is the future of internationalization on your campus?

    d. Has your perception of internationalization shifted because of the

       Confucius Institute on your campus, or the changing nature of geopolitics?

5. Topic 5: Wrap-Up

    a. Is there anything else you'd like to add related to internationalization,

       Confucius Institutes, or the nature of internationalization at a public

       regional institution?

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM: IN PERSON INTERVIEWS

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

CONSENT FORM

Understanding Internationalization through Confucius Institutes at Public Regional
Institutions of Higher Education

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will
help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there
is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator:	Ben Cecil Ph.D. Candidate, Louise McBee Institute of Higher Education bgcecil@uga.edu
Under the direction of:	Timothy R. Cain Associate Professor, Louise McBee Institute of Higher Education tcain@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
We are conducting this research study to learn more about internationalization at public
regional institutions of higher education. Using Confucius Institutes as a unit of analysis
highlights the geopolitical challenges facing the internationalization of higher education
today. This study is guided by three main questions:
1. In what ways do leaders of public regional institutions define and understand internationalization?
2. How do leaders of public regional institutions describe the nature and purpose of Confucius Institutes?
3. What political, social, and economic influences shape a public regional institution's decision making related to Confucius Institutes?

Participation in the Study

You are being invited to be in this research study because of your affiliation with [case site].

If you agree to participate in this study:

- We will collect information about your perception of internationalization and Confucius Institutes at [case site].
- We will ask you to participate in one in-person interview. It will take about 60 minutes. If needed, follow-up interviews can be scheduled with the consent of the researcher and participant.
- Interviews will be recorded.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. A refusal to participate or withdrawal of participation does not have any impact on any benefits you are otherwise entitled to, or activities otherwise conducted as a part of this study.

Possible Risks or Discomfort

There are questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them. Your institution will not be named within this study, and you will be assigned a pseudonym in the final product of this study.

Benefits of the Study

Your responses may help us understand the changing nature of internationalization and international activity at public regional institutions of higher education in the United States. Additionally, your responses may help us further understand the geopolitical challenges of internationalization of U.S. higher education.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, we will assign pseudonyms in the transcription process as well as store recordings of the interviews in a secure drive. We will only keep information that could identify you to the researchers.

Recorded Interviews

Interviews will be recorded using an audio device accessible only to the researcher. The recordings will be used for transcription purposes and then stored on a secure drive only accessible by the researchers. Pseudonyms will be assigned in the transcription process and any identifying information will be removed.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview video recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.
_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Pseudonyms and Identifying Information
The site selected in this case study will be kept anonymous with as little identifying information as possible to be used in the final report which may link to the institution. Additionally, identifying information such as your name will not be used. General titles such as 'Provost' or 'President' may be used that are not directly related to your institution. Pseudonyms will be assigned in the transcription process.

Internet Data Collection
Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

Future Data Usage
There is a chance these data may be used in future studies by the researcher(s) without additional consent. All identifying information and institutional affiliation will not be used or published.

Compensation
You will not receive any incentives or compensation for participation in this study.

Withdrawal from the research study
If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study or the investigator terminates your participation, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

Conflict of Interest
There are no known conflicts of interest with the researchers and this study.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Ben Cecil, at bgcecil@uga.edu or 404-376-2258. Alternatively, if you would like to contact the faculty member supervising this project prior to participation, please contact Dr. Timothy Cain, Associate Professor, Louise McBee Institute of Higher Education, at tcain@uga.edu or 706-542-3464. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM: VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

CONSENT FORM

Understanding Internationalization through Confucius Institutes at Public Regional
Institutions of Higher Education

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will
help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there
is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator:	Ben Cecil Ph.D. Candidate, Louise McBee Institute of Higher Education bgcecil@uga.edu
Under the direction of:	Timothy R. Cain Associate Professor, Louise McBee Institute of Higher Education tcain@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
We are conducting this research study to learn more about internationalization at public
regional institutions of higher education. Using Confucius Institutes as a unit of analysis
highlights the geopolitical challenges facing the internationalization of higher education
today. This study is guided by three main questions:
1. In what ways do leaders of public regional institutions define and understand
   internationalization?
2. How do leaders of public regional institutions describe the nature and purpose of
   Confucius Institutes?
3. What political, social, and economic influences shape a public regional
   institution's decision making related to Confucius Institutes?

Participation in the Study
You are being invited to be in this research study because of your affiliation with [case
site].
If you agree to participate in this study:

- We will collect information about your perception of internationalization and Confucius Institutes at [case site].
- We will ask you to participate in one in-person interview. It will take about 60 minutes. If needed, follow-up interviews can be scheduled with the consent of the researcher and participant.
- Interviews will be recorded.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. A refusal to participate or withdrawal of participation does not have any impact on any benefits you are otherwise entitled to, or activities otherwise conducted as a part of this study.

Possible Risks or Discomfort
There are questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them. Your institution will not be named within this study, and you will be assigned a pseudonym in the final product of this study.

Benefits of the Study
Your responses may help us understand the changing nature of internationalization and international activity at public regional institutions of higher education in the United States. Additionally, your responses may help us further understand the geopolitical challenges of internationalization of U.S. higher education.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, we will assign pseudonyms in the transcription process as well as store recordings of the interviews in a secure drive. We will only keep information that could identify you to the researchers.

Recorded Interviews
Interviews will be recorded through the Zoom platform. The recordings will be used for transcription purposes and then stored on a secure drive only accessible by the researchers. Pseudonyms will be assigned in the transcription process and any identifying information will be removed.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview video recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.
_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Pseudonyms and Identifying Information
The site selected in this case study will be kept anonymous with as little identifying information as possible to be used in the final report which may link to the institution.

Additionally, identifying information such as your name will not be used. General titles such as 'Provost' or 'President' may be used that are not directly related to your institution. Pseudonyms will be assigned in the transcription process.

Internet Data Collection
Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

Future Data Usage
There is a chance these data may be used in future studies by the researcher(s) without additional consent. All identifying information and institutional affiliation will not be used or published.

Compensation
You will not receive any incentives or compensation for participation in this study.

Withdrawal from the research study
If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study or the investigator terminates your participation, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

Conflict of Interest
There are no known conflicts of interest with the researchers and this study.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Ben Cecil, at bgcecil@uga.edu or 404-376-2258. Alternatively, if you would like to contact the faculty member supervising this project prior to participation, please contact Dr. Timothy Cain, Associate Professor, Louise McBee Institute of Higher Education, at tcain@uga.edu or 706-542-3464. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of Researcher | Signature | Date |

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of Participant | Signature | Date |

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

APPENDIX F

QUALITATIVE CODING LIST

Confucius Institute

Background information, Context, China relationships	• Related to the historical establishment of the Confucius Institute, ARU relationships with Chinese partners, and overall process of development
Benefits	• Related to the perceived benefits of having a Confucius Institute within the ARU campus
Challenges - contractual	• Related to the challenges ARU faced with the Confucius Institute directly related to issues, problems, or ambiguities with the Hanban contract
Challenges - perceived	• Related to the challenges faced by ARU with the Confucius Institute, including external pressures; includes challenges not related to contractual agreement
Community reception and connection	• Related to the local community's reception, connection with, and overall perception of the Confucius Institute
Connection to institutional internationalization	• Related to the connection points, direct or inferred, with ARU's overall internationalization plan and strategy
Impact of possible closure	• Related to the campus and community impacts of a closure (by statute or by choice) of the Confucius Institute at ARU
K–12 connection and community	• Related specifically to the connection of the Confucius Institute to the local K-12 schools and community
Perception of Purpose	• Related to the perception of the purpose of the Confucius Institute
Soft Power	• Related to the mention (directly or inferred) of soft power or soft power theory in the context of the Confucius Institute

Institutional Characteristics

Academic Capitalism	• Related to references, directly or inferred, of academic capitalism within the context of the institution, internationalization, or the Confucius Institute
Agility	• Related to references to institutional agility
Community Connection	• Related to references of the connection of ARU with its local community
Governance	• Related to the governance structure, both internal and external, at ARU
Historical Context	• Related to the historical context of the institution
Institutional Identity	• Related to how the institution views itself within the larger higher education sector
Isomorphism	• Related to references, directly or inferred, of isomorphism or isomorphic behavior
Mission	• Related to the mission of the institution - written, espoused, or perceived
Political Context - Institutional	• Related to references of political contexts at the local, state, or federal level that impact ARU

Internationalization

Characteristics and examples	• Related to direct references, examples, and concrete fixtures of internationalization at ARU
Connection to regional mission	• Related to connection points made, directly or inferred, of internationalization to the mission of ARU
Definition	• Related to the understanding and definition of internationalization at ARU
Financial	• Related to connection points made of internationalization to institutional finances, or external financial motivators for internationalization
Motivations and Drivers	• Related to references, direct or inferred, to the motivating factors and drivers for internationalization
Personal Connection	• Related to personal connections to internationalization mentioned by participants
Rurality	• Related to references, direct or inferred, to benefits, challenges, or connections of ARU's rural location to internationalization
Student Experience	• Related to connection points of the student experience as a priority and goal of internationalization
Student Mobility	• Related to the concept of student mobility as a component of internationalization
Student Recruitment	• Related to the process of international student recruitment as a component of internationalization
Value to Campus	• Related to the perceived value of internationalization to campus

Local and State Context

Belief in Cultural Value of Internationalization	Related to references of cultural values related to welcoming other people, places, or cultures within the community
Political Structure and Politics	Related to references of the local and state political context and environment