

EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS HOST COMMUNITY THROUGH THE LENSE OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING: THE EXPERIENCE OF ONTARIO'S UNIVERSITIES

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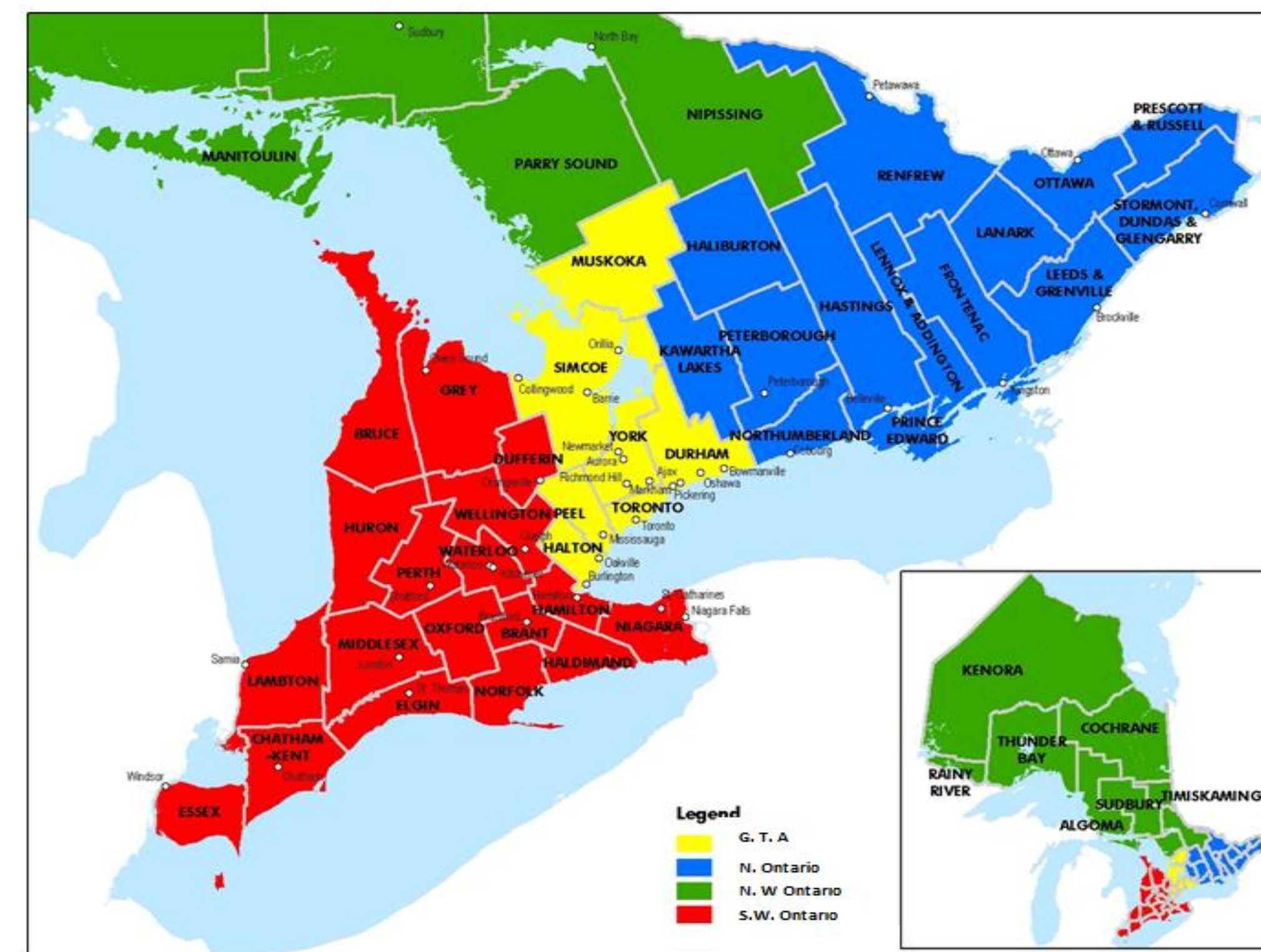
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ABSTRACT

Community engagement is not often a priority amongst universities (Buys & Bursnall, 2007; Kennedy, 2003). Evidence suggests that this trend is changing in the wake of contemporary labor market dynamics, increasing funding opportunities and universities' quests for relevance, among other things (McNall, Reed, Brown, & Allen, 2009; Nübler, 2016). Unlike research-based university-community connections, teaching-based associations are less well documented and understood. This project aims to better understand how experiential or work integrated learning is changing this with a focus on the experience in Ontario, Canada. We document and analyse the evolving WIL relationships between universities and their host communities with an emphasis on the humanities, arts and social science disciplines. Findings from the study will inform policy on work integrated learning in order to help the development of these connections. We also hope to contribute to the debate on, and contributions to, the role of the university within its host community including social and economic development.

STUDY CONTEXT

Ontario - Canada
The choice of Ontario as the study area was influenced by a number of reasons. First, the province hosts the largest number of universities. Second, Ontario has a long history of academic-industry relations (Crespo & Dridi, 2007), and third, the province has a diversity of higher education disciplines.



METHODOLOGY

Research Design
This research was conducted using a qualitative methodology; specifically policy related document analysis and key informant interviews. A qualitative methodology was used to gain insights into the underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations for individual or institutional activities. (Clifford, Holloway, Rice, & Valentine, 2008).

Respondents Selection and Data Collection

In-depth case studies of three selected university-community relationships were carried out. The criteria for selecting the case study universities was based on the outcome of the policy document analysis. Furthermore, where the focus of research is to answer "how", "why" and/or "to what extent", a case study may be a useful approach (Yin, 2003). Informed by this, the three universities selected as a case study for interviews had at least one or more of the following attributes:

- Evolving university-community connections on teaching and learning,
- Non-STEM connections to their host community,
- The work-integrated/experiential relationships are new: two to three years
- some key connections extend beyond the local/community links to international partnerships

Preliminary Analysis

- Data were recorded and transcribed verbatim via telephone interviews.
- Preliminary analysis employed open-coding of transcripts to obtain themes.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

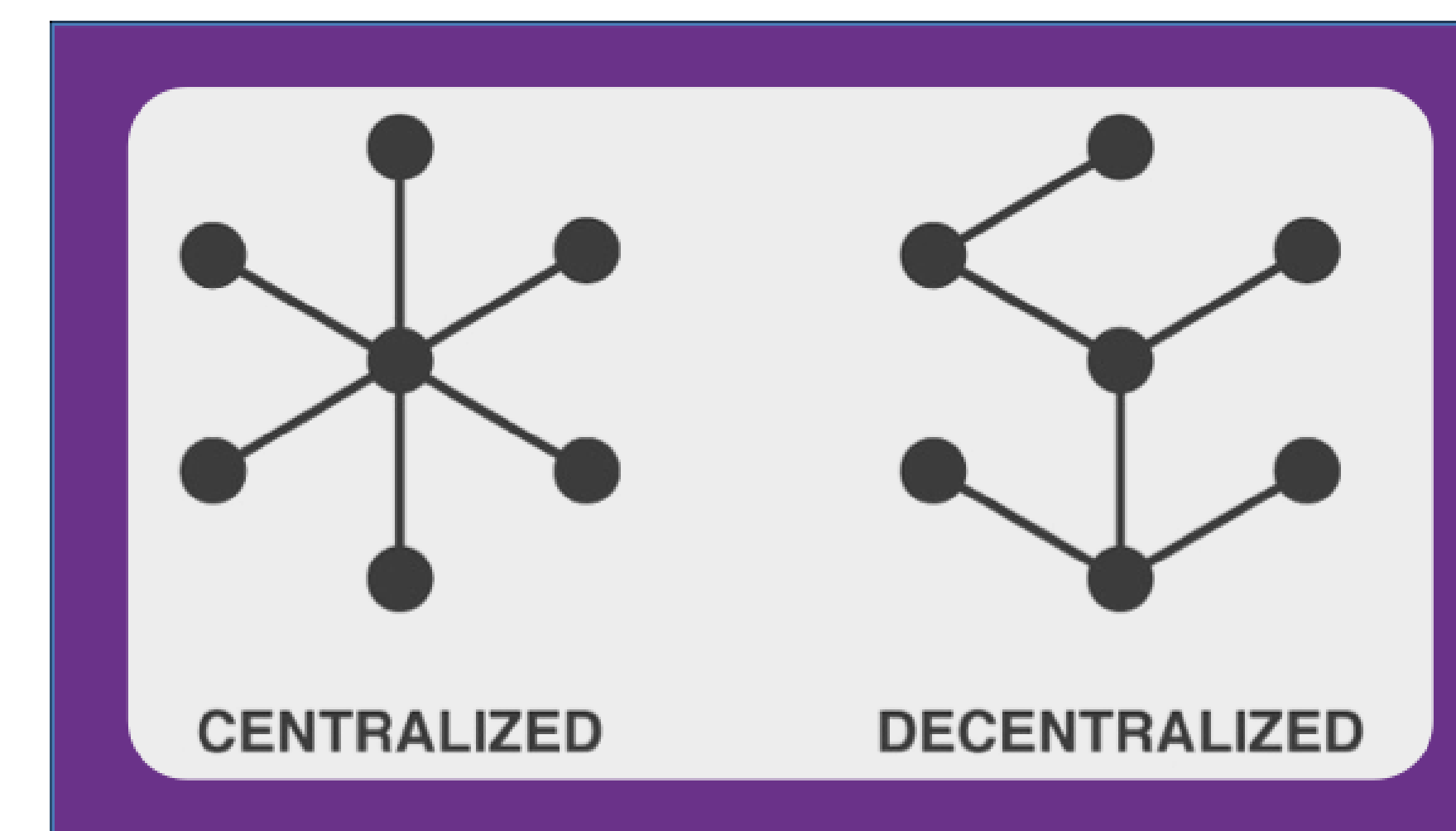
From the policy documents analyzed and the key informant interviews conducted, some key findings emerged:

- Competition vs Collaboration**
 - Within institutions / Departments
 - Among community partners



- Centralization and Decentralization

- Centralized unit to manage all community connections
- Decentralized: Some units within institutions acting autonomously



Source - Emprend Inc

- Ethical considerations**
- Risk & Risk management**
- Insurance, Health & Safety**
- Funding**
- Place**

Contemporary pedagogies

- Artificial Intelligence WIL Simulations
- Community Service Learning
- Incubators and Accelerators
- Field experience / work
- Entrepreneurship

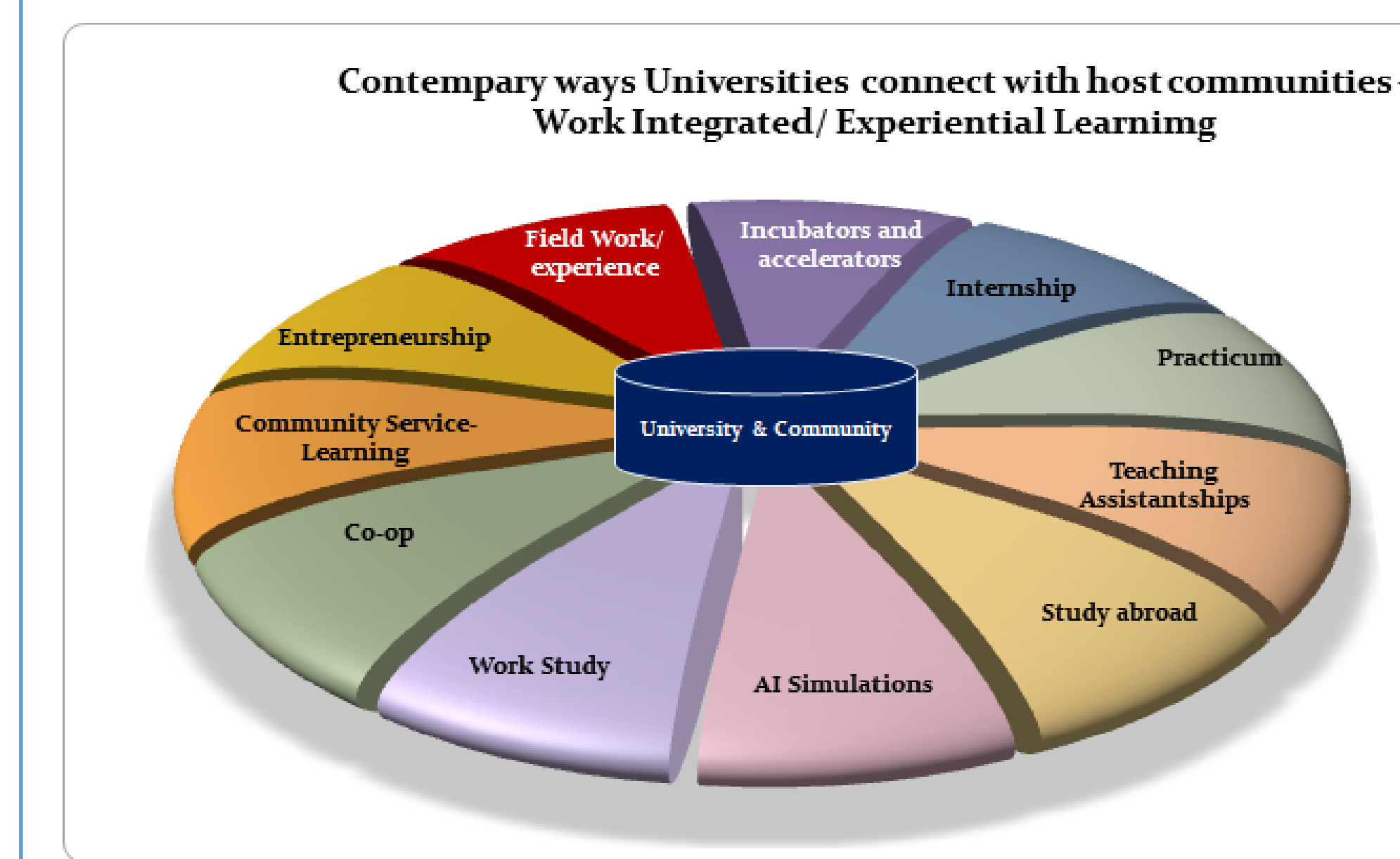


Figure 1. A diagram showing ways Universities and Communities Connect. Source: Author's construct

DISCUSSION

Modes of teaching and learning are changing, as technological advancements and labour market dynamics continue to alter demand patterns for career and skill sets that are vital for human capital development. A 2018 report on the future of education and skills by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) details a framework to shape learning for 2030 (OECD, 2018).

WIL between communities and universities presents a complex process that directly affects the teaching and learning mission of the university and impacts stakeholders in many ways. Although there are evolving developments that encourage universities to form modern non-research-based partnerships with their host communities, diffusion and debates surrounding their overarching benefits persist and therefore warrants further research.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Currently, concerns about the cost implications and other economic measurements of these relationships have not been fully addressed in the existing literature. Understanding the importance of the links within non-STEM disciplines therefore requires further research to inform policy in designing partnerships that benefit the student and all stakeholders more broadly. This research will further contribute to the existing literature by examining the role of contextual factors that influence town-gown relationships.

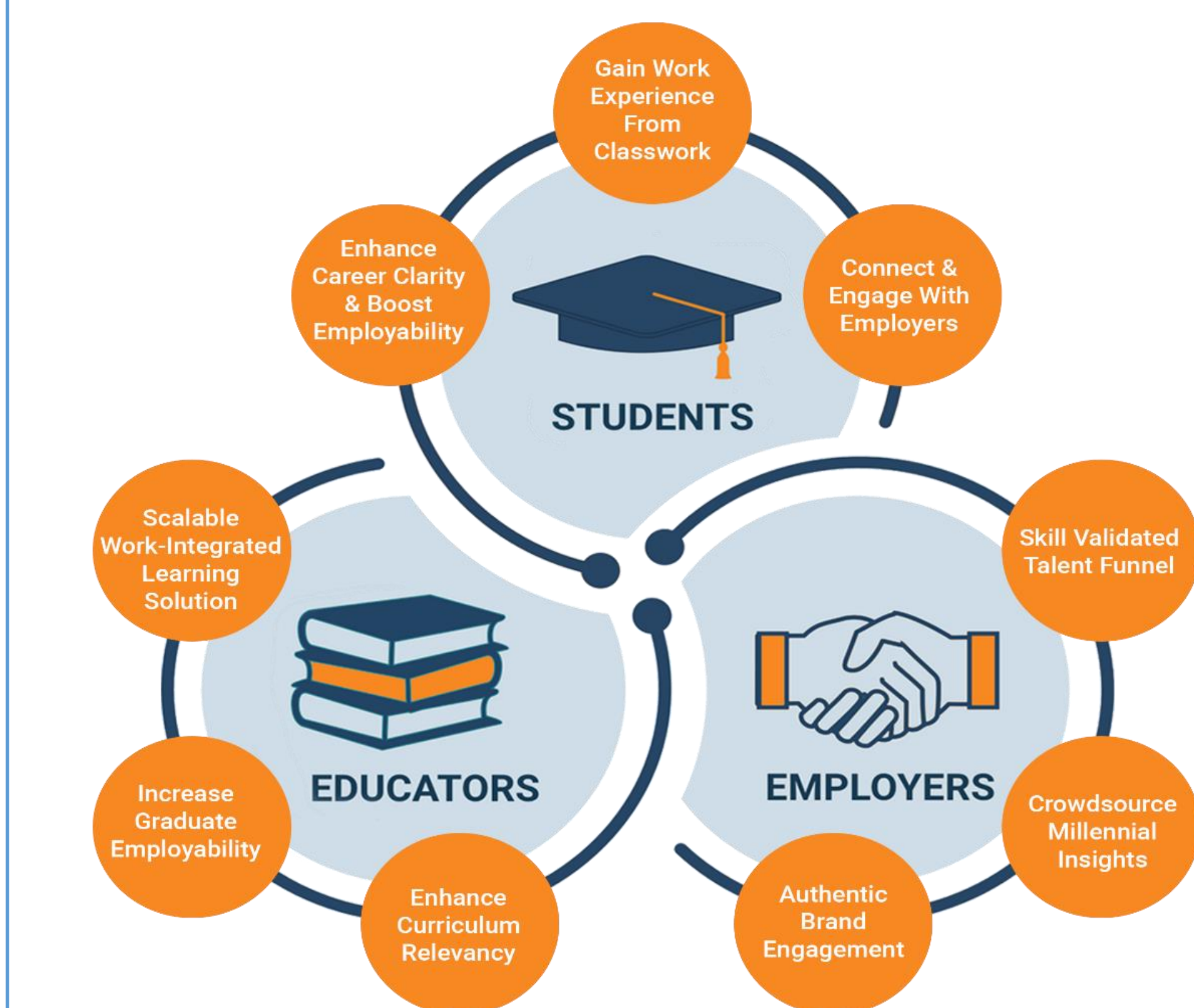
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Source - Riipen - McMaster

Research Objectives

- To examine the correlation between what an institution defines as WIL strategy and community partnerships, and how that shapes their teaching and learning outcomes.
- To identify the contemporary pedagogical models being adopted by institutions on community partnerships.
- To contribute to existing literature and influence higher education policy planning in the 21st century