Narrative Policy Analysis of Prior Learning Assessment: Implications for Democratic Participation in Higher Education Policy Making

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This dissertation titled
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Abstract

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Narrative Policy Analysis of Prior Learning Assessment: Implications for Participation in Higher Education Policy Makings

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Policy making in higher education is highly consequential. As such, we need to consider how opposing policy advocates strategically craft narratives to advantage their side of a policy issue. In this study, prior learning assessment (PLA), which is the educational practice of awarding college credit for learning that occurred outside the college classroom, provides the sample policy issue through which to consider policy narratives. This is the first research utilizing the Narrative Policy Framework in the study of a higher education policy issue. The PLA policy narratives created by Ohio policy makers, higher education newspapers, and prominent PLA advocacy groups are analyzed. Results suggest the structure of the dominant pro-PLA narrative advantages the pro-PLA policy stance. The results also suggest that PLA policy narratives do not typically include the voices of diverse democratic participants. The findings of asymmetry and bias in PLA policy narratives are discussed.

Keywords: policy narratives, Narrative Policy Framework, democratic participation, policy process, prior learning assessment, higher education policy process, Ohio higher education, higher education newspapers
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Chapter One: Introduction

It is an ongoing challenge for scholars to identify the influential forces in higher education policy making. Policy scholars outside the field of higher education increasingly advocate research into the role policy narratives may have in influencing policy making (e.g., Roe, 1994; Stone, 2002, 2012; Shanahan, McBeth, & Jones, 2014). However, higher education policy scholars have yet to adequately explore how policy narratives may influence the policy process.

Policy narratives are “strategic simplifications that help policymaking in the face of situations whose complexity can instill paralysis” (Shanahan, 2012, p. 1). In the study of policy narratives, scholars consider narrative characters; such as a hero, villain, and victim. Policy narrative scholars also consider elements of structure that reveal how the policy narrative depicts plot or moral. The study of policy narratives provides insight into the construction and use of narratives in the context of specific policy issues.

Policy researchers advocate the use of policy narrative studies to consider issues such as power (Roe, 1994), voice, and democracy (Shanahan, McBeth, & Jones, 2014). Analysis of policy narratives reveals not only how the narrative is structured, but also which policy stakeholder group has voice in the narrative. Unequal voice representation in policy narratives can suggest unequal power on all sides of the policy issue (Roe, 1994). These considerations of power and voice illuminate elements of democratic participation in policy making. Through narrative policy research, higher education scholars can examine stakeholder voice and power. In turn, voice and power suggest the extent of democratic participation in higher education policy making.
Several changes in higher education necessitate understanding how policy narratives work. The first change affecting higher education policy is growth in the number of policy think tanks and advocacy groups (Picciano & Springs, 2013). Advocacy groups, by definition, attempt to influence policy decisions. However, think tanks are increasingly attempting to influence policy decisions. Because think tanks have become increasingly polarized in their ideologies (McGann, 2015, p. 24), they have heightened motivation to influence policy decisions. Policy narratives may be one of the tools think tank and advocacy groups use to influence the policy making process. Therefore, higher education policy scholars need to understand how these types of groups strategically construct and use policy narratives to influence policy making.

The second change in higher education that necessitates understanding how policy narratives work pertains to the individuals employed by higher education institutions. In higher education, there has been an increase in the ratio of administrative personnel to tenured faculty members (Marcus, 2014). Because research shows administrative personnel and faculty members consistently differ in their perceptions of academic purpose (Peterson & White, 1992), the two groups may have opposing views on specific policy issues. As the ratio of one group to the other changes, the policy narratives that support the largest groups’ policy stance may become more dominant. Thus, it would be helpful to expand our understanding of whether administrator or faculty voices are dominant in the policy narratives of specific policy issues because it could suggest if a group experiences privilege or marginalization.
The third change in higher education that necessitates understanding how policy narratives work is an increase in external pressure (e.g., Association of Governing Boards, 2012; Immerwahr & Johnson, 2007; Kezar, 2005; Picciano & Spring, 2013; Zusman, 1999). Higher education is experiencing increased levels of external pressure to improve affordability, and increase completion rates for increasingly diverse students. National and state politicians, advocacy groups, parent and student groups, and media reports exert this external pressure. Through research, scholars can consider what role policy narratives play in the increase of external pressures on higher education policy making.

Narrative research has already been helpful in considering aspects of higher education. For example, narrative research has been instrumental in exploring media accounts of higher education (e.g., Birnbaum & Shushok, 2001; Ginsberg & Lyche, 2008). Narrative research has also been useful in explaining the perceptions of the public mission of land-grant colleges (Peters, 2006). Despite these, and many other examples of the value of narrative research in higher education, higher education policy scholars have yet to extend the study of narratives to specific policy issues. Some scholars argue that narrative has been excluded as a result of an entrenched methodological paradigm (van Hulst, 2013) centered on positivist, quantitative, and hypothesis driven research (Borins, 2011).

To study the under-explored role policy narratives may have in higher education policy making, the researcher identified one sample policy issue. Policy narrative studies are typically designed around one policy issue (e.g., Jones, Shanahan, & McBeth, 2014;
Roe, 1994). The policy issue identified for this study of policy narratives was Prior Learning Assessment (PLA).

PLA is the practice of awarding college credit for learning that occurred outside the traditional college classroom. There are several forms of PLA. For example, students may receive PLA college credit for their performance on a standardized test, or for completing a portfolio documenting learning acquired through work experience, or receive PLA credit after a review of military service learning transcripts.

PLA was selected as the policy issue in this study of policy narratives for several reasons. First, PLA was selected because the practice of PLA has critics (Public Agenda, 2013), but policy growth is still occurring. Some faculty members have expressed concern that PLA conflicts with the primary purposes of education (Public Agenda, 2013). Concerns over PLA quality have also been raised (Stenlund, 2010; Public Agenda, 2013). Despite criticisms, policy increasing the use of PLA is growing. If there were no discernible criticisms, growth of PLA policy might simply be the result of all policy stakeholders supporting the practice of PLA. However, PLA policy is growing despite criticisms from some stakeholders. PLA policy growth undeterred by critics may suggest that policy narratives are used strategically to overcome policy resistance. Therefore, because PLA policy is being enacted despite disagreement, the issue is suitable for analysis. If PLA was a policy issue that had already been decided, or one that was at such an early stage that it was more of a theory than a policy proposal, it may be difficult to analyze the issue for policy narratives.
The second reason PLA was selected as the policy issue in this study is because the policy outcomes could be highly consequential to both pro-PLA and anti-PLA groups. For example, if changes in policy allow the costs of PLA to be covered by federal student loans, student funds could be redirected to assessment agencies outside the academy. When policy outcomes are highly consequential, the policy groups have heightened motivation to influence the policy making. Groups may, in turn, increase their use of policy narratives when they have a heightened motivation to influence policy making. If the use of PLA policy narratives increases as groups try to influence policy making, this research project could benefit from more available data.

The third reason PLA was selected as the policy issue in this study is because it has been receiving increased attention within the state of Ohio and nationally (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013). If there were little attention being given to a specific policy issue, it is unlikely policy narratives would be available for study. However, because PLA is receiving increased attention, it may suggest PLA policy narratives are available for study purposes.

PLA was also selected as the policy issue because it can be examined at both the state and national level. The increased attention being given PLA both in Ohio and nationally means two levels of policy narratives can be considered in this study. By selecting PLA as the policy issue, the researcher can make comparisons between state and national policy narratives. Additionally, while PLA is an issue of national prominence and importance, PLA policy is largely carried out on a state-by-state basis. This suggests that the PLA policy growth happening in Ohio could happen in other states.
Thus, the study of PLA policy narratives in Ohio could shed light on how the discourse is understood in other states. Studying the PLA policy narratives in Ohio could inform understanding of PLA policy in other states.

In this introduction thus far, policy narratives were defined and the changing conditions within higher education that necessitate the study of policy narratives were detailed. Reasons for the selection of PLA as the policy issue in this policy narrative study were also provided.

**Problem Statement**

Higher education policy scholars have a limited understanding of policy narratives in the higher education policy process. Although policy scholars outside the field of higher education advocate the study of policy narratives (e.g., Fischer, 2003; Fischer & Forester, 1993; Jones & McBeth, 2010; Roe, 1994; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2013), higher education policy study has not engaged in substantial inquiry of policy narratives. Higher education policy researchers have yet to meet the call of scholars (e.g., Bastedo, 2007) to expand research methodologies in education policy scholarship. Additionally, researchers have yet to respond to the call of policy scholars (e.g., Shanahan, McBeth, & Jones, 2014) to extend the testing of new policy narrative frameworks across multiple disciplines such as education.

Study of policy narratives could expand understanding of how groups attempt to influence the higher education policy process, and that is increasingly important given the changing conditions within higher education. Higher education is experiencing increased external pressures from groups such as the media, state and national politicians, and
advocacy coalitions, to increase completion rates for increasingly diverse students and improve affordability. However, the policy changes that are recommended by the various groups are not always in alignment. These differing policy positions cause opposing interest groups to compete in the higher education policy arena. As the number and diversity of groups attempting to influence the policy making process in higher education increases, the importance of considering how those interest groups strategically construct and use policy narratives to influence policy outcomes also increases.

An understanding of the construction and use of policy narratives could help both policy scholars and higher education policy stakeholders. Policy scholars continue to seek explanatory theories of the policy process (Sabatier & Weible, 2014), and policy narratives could illuminate under-considered influences. Scholars also benefit from analysis of policy narratives because it could suggest the extent of democratic participation in policy making. Higher education policy stakeholders, such as administrators, faculty members, and legislators, could also benefit from knowledge of how policy narratives influence the policy process. Stakeholders could leverage knowledge of how their policy position could benefit from strategically crafted policy narratives.

In summary, to build understanding of how policy narratives are constructed and used in the higher education policy process, one sample policy issue was identified for study. PLA was selected as the policy issue for four reasons: it has critics, provides an opportunity to consider both national and state level narratives, is experiencing increased policy attention, and is highly consequential for groups on all sides of the issue.
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is a combination of three related concepts from multiple scholars. First, the philosophical writings of John Dewey (1916) suggest that communication, education, and democracy are intertwined elements of our society. If citizens desire a democratic society, then education and communication are necessities. Individuals must have education to communicatively participate in democracy. And a strong democracy requires diverse participants communicatively engaged. As we expand our understanding of communications in policy making, we can also expand the education we provide about the workings of our democratic society. In this study, the triad of communication, education, and democracy are intertwined elements that can be explored through the study of PLA policy narratives.

The second contribution to the conceptual framework for this study comes from the policy scholarship of Jones and McBeth (2010). Jones and McBeth provide the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) which has four testable assumptions about policy narratives. The NPF approaches policy narratives from a structuralist perspective. As such, the NPF allows narrative elements to be quantified and structurally analyzed. Analyzing the structural elements of PLA policy narratives provides a way to expand understanding of the communication that takes place in the democratic policy arena.

The third contribution to the conceptual framework for this study comes from Entman’s (2007) conceptualization of bias. Entman argues that the concept of bias can help integrate and understand the implications of framing, priming, and agenda-setting during the policy process. Simply stated, bias in the policy process shapes and alters
interpretations and preferences. If bias is apparent in PLA policy narratives, then the finding can expand understanding of (thus, education about) communication in the democratic policy making process.

As Figure 1 summarizes, three related concepts formed the framework for this study. The grounding philosophy is that communication, education, and democracy are intertwined (Dewey, 1916). A strong democracy requires diverse participants communicatively engaged. Participants communicatively engage when they are educated about and for the democratic process. As scholars, we can gain insight into communication in the policy process (a democratic process) through analysis of policy narratives. NPF provides for structural analysis of policy narratives. If analysis of the policy narratives suggests there is bias in the framing, priming, or agenda setting, then the findings contribute to understanding of the communication occurring in the democratic process. Ultimately, as educators, we can then educate democratic stakeholders about the communication that is part of the policy environment.
Purpose Statement

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the role of policy narratives in the higher education policy process and to extend the testing of a new policy narrative framework to the field of higher education. It was also a purpose of this study to consider how the structure of policy narratives may influence democratic participation in the policy making process. To fulfill the overarching purpose, this research project used the sample higher education policy issue of PLA. Thus, the most specific purpose of this study was to determine the PLA policy narratives, and the implications of those narratives, at the state level in Ohio, and the national level in higher education newspapers and prominent PLA advocacy groups.
**Research Questions**

There were four research questions guiding this policy narrative study. The research questions were:

RQ1: What narratives surround PLA policy for Ohio policy makers, higher education newspapers, and prominent PLA advocacy groups?

RQ2: How are the narratives surrounding PLA policy structured?

RQ3: What do the PLA narratives suggest about the democratic participation in higher education policy making?

RQ4: What support exists for using the Narrative Policy Framework in researching higher education policy?

**Overview of Methods**

The methods used in this study are fully detailed in Chapter Three. This overview provides general information.

To address the research questions and fulfill the purpose of this study, narrative policy analysis research methods were employed. To provide both state and national level perspectives, this study involved collecting narrative data from several sources.

The Ohio state level PLA policy narratives were collected from both interviews and documents. Interviews were conducted with state level policy makers at the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) formerly known as the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR). The ODHE is a Cabinet-level agency for the Ohio Governor that oversees higher education across the state (ODHE, nd. para. 1). The agency’s main responsibilities include, “developing and advocating policies to maximize higher education’s
contributions to the state and its citizens” (ODHE, nd. para. 1). The state level policy makers who were interviewed for this study have direct involvement with Ohio’s state-wide PLA policy initiative titled, “PLA with a Purpose.”

Ohio state level PLA policy narratives were also collected from documents. An exhaustive search of the PLA documents on the ODHE website was conducted. The documents matching the inclusion criteria for this study were then further analyzed.

A national level perspective of PLA policy narratives was gained through analysis of documents created by national higher education newspapers and nationally prominent PLA advocacy groups. The selection of these sources was based on prior research findings. Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway (2011) identified that media policy narratives influence opinion on a policy issue. Therefore, it was important to include PLA policy narratives from higher education media in this research project. Researchers have also detailed the influence advocacy groups have on policy issues (e.g., Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Weible, & Sabatier, 2014; Picciano & Spring, 2013). Therefore, including the PLA policy narratives produced by advocacy groups was also important in this research. Exhaustive searches of the PLA documents from the higher education newspapers and nationally prominent PLA advocacy groups were conducted, and the documents matching the inclusion criteria were further analyzed.

**Significance of the Study**

This study makes several contributions to the study of higher education policy. First, the study contributes to general understanding of the construction and use of narratives in the policy process. By researching the policy narratives surrounding PLA, as
scholars, we can learn how stakeholders in the higher education policy process utilize different narrative structures in support of their proposed policy solution. Expanding general understanding of narratives in the policy process can improve the practical work of higher education lobbyists, policy makers, and educators in the field.

While this study contributes to general understanding of the higher education policy process, it also helps build a specific knowledge of what is occurring in PLA policy. Because expanding the use of PLA could have practical and financial effects on the higher education industry, this study will make a valuable contribution to policy knowledge.

Specific knowledge of PLA is valuable as legislators approach the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) (1965). If pro-PLA advocates receive authorization for students to use federal grant and loan money on PLA college credits, that will precipitate unknown effects on the higher education industry. Therefore, this study contributes specifically to understanding of PLA policy in a way that will help higher education administrators, policy makers, and educators.

This study also expands knowledge of policy process theory. The Narrative Policy Framework (Jones & McBeth, 2010) has not yet been applied in the higher education policy setting. Serving as the initial attempt to apply the theoretical framework to higher education research, this study can begin to collect evidence of the framework’s value in higher education. If the NPF proves valuable, then higher education policy researchers could expand policy narrative scholarship to many other contemporary policy issues. Thus, theorists, scholars, and educators can benefit from this expansion of theory.
In this study, PLA policy serves as a representative anecdote of a larger policy conversation. PLA is not the only, or necessarily the most important policy issue facing higher education today. However, PLA is a representative anecdote of policies that potentially alter the traditional design of higher education. Similar policy topics include concepts such as competency education and dual enrollment. Therefore, studying PLA policy narratives informs a larger discussion on policies that potentially redesign the delivery structure of higher education.

**Delimitations**

The interviews and document analysis conducted for this study were performed between December, 2014 and August, 2015. The study took place in Ohio and included interviews from Ohio Board of Regents policy makers to represent a state level view of PLA policy. The interview participants were selected because they were policy makers directly involved in Ohio’s PLA with A Purpose state-wide initiative.

The documents included in this study were open-access, meaning they are available to any interested person. The documents representing the higher education newspaper narratives were collected from the *Inside Higher Ed* website as well as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* website. The documents representing Ohio Board of Regents were collected from their website. The documents representing PLA advocacy groups were collected from the websites of Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), Lumina Foundation, and American Council on Education (ACE).

To be included in the research, the document must have been created between 2009 and August, 2015. To be included in this study, the document had to be primarily
about PLA and of a length that would allow a narrative to be detected. For example, a document announcing that a PLA advocacy group received a grant, with no additional information provided, was not included in this study. Therefore, the included documents had to meet the requirements of open-access, a production date between 2009 and August, 2015, length enough to be analyzed for a narrative, and have PLA as a primary focus.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is presented in five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the research problem and the significance of the problem. Chapter Two presents previous research and provides a review of literature that informs this research project. Chapter Three details the methods used to address the research questions. Chapter Four presents findings from the research. Chapter Five provides analyses and interpretations of the findings as well as suggestions for further research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter begins with a description of the philosophical lens that helped guide this research. Then, there is discussion of how this study is grounded in a larger conversation about democracy. The brief introduction from Chapter One about communication, education, and democracy intertwining and informing one another (Dewey, 1916) is expanded in this chapter. As was depicted in Figure 1 in Chapter One, the notion of communication, education, and democracy intertwined is one of the three concepts that forms the conceptual framework for this study.

The remainder of this chapter is organized by the concepts shown in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows nested layers of narratives that effect the context for this PLA policy narrative research. As Figure 2 depicts, the central focus of this study (thus, the center circle in the figure) is PLA narratives. However, each concentric circle represents a layer of narratives that contributes to the context for this study. This chapter describes how each layer of narrative has been explored in prior scholarship to demonstrate the importance of extending narrative research to specific policy issues. Also, this chapter discusses how each layer of narrative impacts the other layers because all the narrative layers inform the final interpretations from this PLA policy narrative research.
Figure 2: Nested Narratives Creating Context for Researching PLA Policy Narratives
The nested narratives shown in Figure 2 are discussed in this chapter starting from the outermost circle and moving inward through each of the narrative levels. The outermost circle of Figure 2 is metanarratives. Metanarratives operate at the broadest, cultural level. How metanarratives may impact interpretations of PLA policy narratives is discussed.

The next layer in Figure 2 is narratives in public dialogue. This section provides descriptions of how a narrative lens has been helpful to researchers when considering public issues like policy. Then, the third layer is the historical higher education narratives. This section considers how the historical narratives contribute to the way PLA narratives are perceived.

The fourth layer in Figure 2 is the NPF and bias. As was described in Chapter One, the NPF and bias are two of the three interrelated concepts that create the conceptual framework for this study. As such, the NPF and bias create a narrative lens through which this researcher approached the study of PLA and the policy process.

Then, the two innermost circles on Figure 2 are discussed. The innermost circles represent contemporary narratives that contribute to the way PLA policy narratives are interpreted. The narratives of the Completion Agendas (Obama, 2009; OBR, nd; Lumina Foundation, 2009) will be discussed. Then, the research on PLA is critiqued. The purpose of critiquing PLA research is to evaluate the strength of the research that may inform policy makers and also to evaluate if the research is ultimately woven into the PLA policy narratives.
Instrumentalism Philosophy

In this study, the researcher was guided by the philosophical lens of *Instrumentalism* (Dewey, 1912). Closely related to pragmatism, instrumentalism is concerned with practical effects rather than the search for absolute truth. Through an instrumentalist lens, theories are useful depending on how effective they are in explaining or predicting phenomena and should not be measured as true or false (Mastin, 2008). The practical value of policy narrative research is emphasized through this philosophical lens.

Within the instrumentalism philosophy, studying policy narratives can be understood as inquiry concerned with the possible implications of the narratives, but not a desire to prove an absolute narrative. Through an instrumentalist lens, “truth is an instrument used by human beings to solve their problems” (Neill, 2005, para. 5). Because human problems change, “truth” changes as well (Neill, 2005). There is no eternal, absolute truth through this lens (Dewey, 1912). Guided by instrumentalism, research focuses on practical effects and consequences instead of trying to identify absolute truths.

Communication, Education, and Democracy

This policy narrative study is grounded in a larger philosophical conversation about democracy. As researchers empirically demonstrate the greater policy influence of economic elites and organized groups compared to average citizens and mass-based interest groups (Gilens & Page, 2014), we are challenged to build our understanding of what tools gain advantage for elites and organized groups. Through narrative policy research, we can explore how narratives are used in the policy process and consider if
narratives advantage organized groups. Ultimately then, as scholars we can consider the implications of narratives on democratic participation in policy making.

The philosophical writings of Dewey (1916) provide that communication, education, and democracy are intertwined elements of our society. Dewey contends that communication is the essence of, and equivalent to, human social life. Simply stated, he asserts communication is life. Dewey also argued communication was the mechanism or means of education. Dewey (1916) writes that all communication is education, except when communication “becomes cast in a mold and runs in a routine way does it lose its educative power” (p. 9). He further posited that democracy required education (which again he equates to communication). Therefore, Dewey’s philosophical lens creates a concise triad that pulls together the foundational elements of this policy narrative research; communication, education, and democracy.

Dewey (1916) argued communicative participation is a cornerstone of democracy. However, this means democracy takes personal effort. All citizens must be willing to engage in the dialectical process. Dewey argues democracy is not easy, and participation must be constant. Hutchins (1954) makes a similar argument when stating, “The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference, and undernourishment” (p.23). When there is limited communicative participation, democracy is weakened.

Premised on the philosophy that strong communicative participation is essential in democracy, the present study sought to explore the extent to which higher education stakeholders are engaged in the narrative debate about the expansion of PLA. Are diverse
higher education stakeholders represented in the dialectic process? Dewey contends (1916) that democracy is strengthened when more voices are engaged in the process. If diverse higher education stakeholders are not represented in the dialectic process concerning PLA expansion, it raises concerns for democratic participation in higher education policy making.

However, there has been a longstanding debate about the ability of “the public” to fully participate in a democracy. This debate leads to the creation of one of Dewey’s classic texts. In 1927, Dewey wrote *Public and Its Problems* as a response to Walter Lippman’s *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925). Numerous scholars have studied the Lippman-Dewey debate (for examples see DeCesare, 2012; Dell & Knoedler, 2006; Ralston, 2009). As a scholar of the Lippman-Dewey debate, Ralston (2014) succinctly provides that,

> Lippman argued that, contrary to the myth of the ‘omnicompetent citizen’, average citizens of a democracy are poor judges of the social good, since they are too busy and ignorant to do more than act upon inaccurate ‘stereotypes’ in their heads. Experts and leaders, on the other hand, can render superior evaluations and decisions, since they have the time and training to collect ‘intelligence’ and craft appropriate policy instruments (p. 12).

Dewey disagrees with Lippman’s assertion that only the elite are fully capable of democratic participation. Instead, Dewey contends that all individuals must participate in democracy.
Dewey (1927) argues that elites and policymakers do not have the same practical knowledge that can be contributed by members of the public. While Dewey is criticized for having an idealistic view of democracy (Bhattacharyya, 2007), the opposite position embraces policy making through elitism. The contrast between believing all individuals must participate in democracy and believing only the elite are fully capable of democratic participation is as relevant today as it was when Dewey originally penned his argument.

In the present study, policy narratives are used to consider if there is an elite, closed circuit excluding multiple voices in PLA policy making. Picciano and Spring (2013, pp. 119-142) raise concerns over the influence of foundations and think tanks on policy making. And in this study, consideration is given to the idea of a closed circuit because it may suggest the extent of democratic participation in PLA policy making.

Dewey (1927, 2014) argues that education is what supports the public’s ability to participate in the democratic process. The better our understanding of the policy arena, the better we can educate for democratic participation. Researching how policy making is being influenced by narratives can contribute to an improved understanding of the democratic process.

Dewey (1916, 1927) does not make communication, education, and democracy a linear proposition. Instead, there is an intertwining, coexistence among these phenomena. In a similar spirit, in this study, PLA policy narratives are explored to determine if multiple voices are apparent. The findings can then inform education and communication about democratic participation in policy making.
**Metanarratives and Higher Education**

Narratives are a social construct. Through experiences, dialogue, conflict, agreement, and re-storying, narratives are socially constructed. Some narratives exist at the macro, or cultural, level. This type of cultural level narrative is known as a metanarrative. As Harter, Japp, and Beck (2005) describe, these metanarratives, “embody the matrix of assumptions, expectations, and values common to our public cultural narratives (p. 3).” To describe this in more colloquial terms, a story is not just a story. It is loaded with our cultural orientations. Because metanarratives contain our public assumptions, expectations and common values, metanarratives about higher education create and reveal a context through which policy narratives exist.

The scholarship of Peters (2006) provides an example of how knowledge of the metanarratives in higher education could inform our understanding of policy creation and interpretation. Ellison (2006) writes that Peters reveals, “how the public mission of our colleges and universities has been—and is still being—negotiated through much-debated heroic, tragic, and prophetic meta-narratives” (p. 1). The metanarratives ultimately create a lens through which democratic participants make sense of higher education and its issues.

Through the study of metanarratives, Peters (2006) explored competing accounts of the public mission of American land-grant colleges between 1880 and 1930. While the original narrative impetus for land-grant colleges was the democratization of higher learning (Brubacher & Rudy, 2008), Peters describes how a heroic metanarrative, a tragic counter-narrative, and a prophetic counter-narrative eventually emerged. The heroic
metanarrative of the public mission of land-grant colleges presents a story of college learning that is democratized through an opening of access to common people, a broadening of the curriculum to make the professions of common people as worthy of study as the elite professions, and active extension and distribution of new scientific expertise and knowledge (Peters, 2006). In the heroic metanarrative, scientific experts from the college are the heroes who save the farmers of the era from their unsolved technical problems.

Peters (2006) also describes the tragic counter-narrative of the public mission of land-grant colleges. The tragic counter-narrative presents a story of “technocratic colonization and environmental destruction” (Peters, 2006, p. 12). In the tragic counter-narrative, the scientific college experts were cast as villains. The scientific college experts sought to modernize agriculture in ways that ultimately “privileged elite urban industrial interests over those of rural communities” (Peters, p. 12). Contrasted with the heroic metanarrative of ascendency, the tragic counter-narrative tells of oppression and loss.

The third metanarrative that Peters’ (2006) study of land-grant colleges between 1880 and 1930 suggests was the prophetic counter-narrative. In the prophetic counter-narrative, the story tells of the “difficult struggles for freedom and sustainability, rather than simply economic gain” (Peters, 2006, p. 18). In this metanarrative, there is concern for farmers’ ability to participate fully in democracy, and also for the continuance of rural communities. In this story, the land-grant colleges were positioned within politics and culture in order to effect common good.
Salient to this research project, Peters’ (2006) argument of three different metanarratives demonstrates how narrative creates a framework through which individuals come to understand and interpret higher education’s mission. It is through the nested layers of narratives that individuals consider a specific policy issue. For example, the scientific quest to discover how to produce “cheap food” may be interpreted as a good thing through the lens of the heroic narrative because the experts are trying to “feed the world.” However, the scientific quest to produce “cheap food” may instead be interpreted negatively through the lens of the tragic counter-narrative because the experts are trying to generate economic gain for select individuals or interests. While this research study is about PLA policy narratives, Peters’ work demonstrates that making sense of the research findings requires consideration of the hierarchical, nested, and interrelated narratives that inform our understanding of higher education.

**Narratives in Public Dialogue**

A narrative both reveals and conceals. Narratives are not neutral; they have a position. They situate characters in primary or peripheral roles. Some narrative characters are cast as villains or victims. And some are heroes. Narratives also suggest power structures and imbalances. The study of narratives, then, becomes a way to unpack complex issues. Through critique, scholars can consider what is apparent in a narrative and also what is not openly stated. Through both their inclusions and omissions, narratives can expand our understanding of how people make sense of public issues.

As part of the rhetorical tradition, narratives in public dialogue have been the subject of theorizing for centuries (West & Turner, 2014). Since Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*
there has been theory of how communication strategically occurs in public. More recently, Walter Fisher (1984) provided The Narrative Paradigm with five assumptions that place narrative foremost in our human experience. One of Fisher’s (1987) assumptions was that humans experience a story-filled world and must chose among them. Then, even more recently, Fischer and Forester (1996) provide *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*. Fischer and Forester argue that “the language of policy and planning analyses not only depicts but also constructs the issues at hand” (p. 1). Plotted on a timeline, the work of these scholars over the years show how thinking about narratives’ role continues to evolve.

Narratives have been studied across a wide range of academic disciplines (Borins, 2014). The breadth of disciplines studying narratives has revealed not only the value of narrative scholarship, but also the diversity of context that narrative is well-suited to explore. For example, while instructional communication scholars identified that students retain more information when it is presented in the form of a narrative and at a normal rate (Glonek & King, 2014), neurochemical scientists identified character-driven stories consistently caused the brain to release oxytocin which contributes to one’s willingness to engage in cooperative behaviors (Zak, 2014). These are just a few of the diverse findings about narratives, but they demonstrate that our knowledge of how instrumental the study of narrative can be in understanding our social lives and constructs is expanding.

Narratives serve a strategic purpose in the policy arena. Stone (2002, 2012) places narratives in the principal position in the policy arena. She contends that, “In politics, *narrative stories* are the principal means for defining and contesting policy problems”
(original emphasis) (Stone, 2012, p. 158). If narratives are central in the policy process, then thoroughly studying them in the higher education policy arena is imperative.

The study of narratives has been revealing in various policy contests. When Roe (1994) first introduced the practice of narrative policy analysis in his book *Narrative Policy Analysis: Theory and Practice*, he demonstrated how narrative was instrumental in understanding contentious policy issues. He analyzed narratives surrounding issues like pesticide use, using animals in research, global warming, and rights to Native American remains. In analyzing these controversial policy issues, Roe revealed how narratives can provide a helpful unit of analysis. Narratives become a unit of analysis that can help analysts better understand the issue because highly contested issues often involve disputed “facts,” or disagreement on the “best” criteria to use to evaluate the policies.

Salient to this study of PLA policy narrative is Roe’s (1994) argument that studying narratives can help analysts explore power relations in the policy arena. Roe explains that in some policy issues there are narratives and counter-narratives. Sometimes, however, there are not discernible counter-narratives. In some cases, there are narratives on one side of a policy issue and then just critiques of that narrative provided by the opposing groups. In these “asymmetrical narratives” (Roe, 1994, p. 67), where one party has created a narrative that provides a structure to help people understand an issue, and the other party has provided only critique that dismantles the opposition’s argument but does not provide an alternative scaffold of understanding, the resulting narrative imbalance might suggest that there is a power imbalance. Roe contends that asymmetrical narratives reveal that the parties on either side of the issue
may have unequal access to power and resources. Therefore, if asymmetrical narratives are revealed in this study of PLA policy, it may suggest that the power and resources available to both sides of the policy issue are unequal.

Stone (2002) also demonstrates the benefit of considering narratives in her book *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*. Stone analyzes the narratives that have been used surrounding affirmative action in higher education. Stone works through each of the concepts presented in her book while analyzing the policy conflict surrounding affirmative action. She reviews how the metaphor of decision making being “color blind” has been used powerfully on both sides of the policy debate. Despite its origin as a symbol of racial justice in Justice John Harlan’s dissent from *Plessy v. Ferguson*, it has been effectively used to argue against affirmative action in higher education. Stone then provides this advice:

> What do you do when the other side has co-opted your symbol? You search their argument for its implicit dramatic story, its depiction of good and evil and heroes and villains. Then you can question each element of the story (2002, p. 394).

Stone’s advice will be equally helpful when considering how PLA advocacy groups have positioned their frame of what higher education should be like.

The study of narrative has demonstrated its usefulness in many public areas. In this project, the study of narratives will help build our understanding of PLA policy expansion. Ultimately, increasing our understanding of how narratives are used in PLA policy may also raise awareness of other higher education policy issues that could benefit from narrative analysis.
Historical Higher Education Narratives

So far in this chapter, there has been discussion of two nested layers of narrative that create a context through which higher education policy is considered. The layers discussed were metanarratives and narratives in public dialogue. Now, we come to the third nested circle introduced in Figure 2 and consider how historical education narratives created a negative context for policy issues.

Historically, higher education is described through a crisis narrative (Birnbaum & Shushok, 1987; Ginsberg & Lyche, 2008; Ravitch, 2010, 2013; Rivlin, 1987). Alice Rivlin was a scholar engaged in higher education policy making in numerous ways. Her career included being the first director of the Congressional Budget Office, Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and director of Economic Studies Program at the Brookings Institute (Gladieux, 1987). She wrote a report commonly referred to as “The Rivlin Report” which helped lay the groundwork for what are now called Pell Grants. When this highly accomplished higher education policy maker was asked to speak about her reflections on 20 years of higher education policy, she offered,

The first characteristic of policy-making is the need for a crisis. In higher education, as in other areas of public policy, the American political system seems unable to engage in a serious debate about policy change–let alone to undertake action–unless some form of doom is widely felt to be impending (Rivlin, 1987, p. 7).

Although Rivlin encouraged higher education to move beyond the need for crisis to promote change, she offered that any secretary of education who did not engage in the
crisis narrative would likely not last long in the job. So, from her lived experience, Rivlin identified the crisis narrative as central in the higher education policy arena.

Birnbaum and Shushok (2001) added empirical data to the argument that the crisis narrative is central in higher education. In their chapter, *The “Crisis” Crisis in Higher Education*, Birnbaum and Shushok analyzed higher education periodical literature for the 25 year span between 1970 and 1994. As a result of their analysis, they identified four crisis categories in higher education: pandemic, chronic, sporadic, or idiosyncratic (Birnbaum & Shushok, 1987). The pandemic and chronic crisis categories are most relevant to review for this PLA policy narrative study.

Birnbaum and Shushok (1987) define a pandemic crisis as one that is continually and frequently claimed. In their study, finances were the only topic reaching the level of pandemic crisis. What the authors also discuss is how the financial conditions in higher education have been continually in “crisis.” Although the rhetoric may elevate to the “higher education is doomed” level at times, they discuss that the financial crisis claims are remarkably similar over their 25-year study span.

According to Birnbaum and Shushok (1987), a chronic crisis is one that appears with moderate continuity and frequency. In their study, five topics reached the chronic crisis level. The chronic crises were: confidence, curriculum, stagnation, diversity/equity, and leadership/governance/management. The authors discuss the confidence crisis and identify that the evidence to support the confidence crisis is largely anecdotal and when there is systematic evidence, the evidence does not support the claim. They also discuss the stagnation crisis and refute the claim with numerous findings. Birnbaum and Shushok
offer that, “It is difficult to support the critics’ argument that higher education doesn’t change, although whether it is changing quickly enough and, more to the point, whether it is changing in the directions desired by the critic are other matters” (p. 69). Findings that the narrative did not need to have supporting evidence to reach the chronic crisis level may be relevant in this study of PLA policy narratives.

Birnbaum’s and Shushok’s (1987) findings that the most common crisis narrative involves finances, and that the next most frequent crisis narratives involve issues like lack of confidence and higher education stagnation may suggest that in the present study, the PLA policy narratives may use similar narrative structures. After all, Birnbaum and Shushok (1987) contend that “The strong rhetoric and vivid images of crisis are useful tools with which to gain attention, power, and control of organizational and symbolic processes in a noisy world” (pp. 69-70). In higher education, the crisis narrative is certainly not new and it has demonstrated its effectiveness for change advocates.

Historically, at the federal-level, there have been very powerful narratives advocating the overhaul of our nation’s public education system. The federal-level narrative is one of crisis built on the idea that our country is at risk of losing our entire way of life because, change advocates argue, the U.S. is educationally not keeping pace with other countries. Despite data demonstrating its inaccuracy, this narrative is powerful in advancing the cause of change advocates. Next, the arguments of Ravitch (2010, 2013), and Ginsberg and Lyche (2008) further describe higher education agendas and narratives.
Before discussing the arguments of Ravitch (2010, 2013) concerning several federal-level education agendas, and the findings of Ginsberg and Lyche (2008) concerning the narrative created by "A Nation at Risk" (1983), it is important to note that this section contains discussion on federal-level education policy that effects K-20. It was a conscious decision to include critiques of federal-level education agendas at both the K-12 and higher education levels due to their similarities. At the federal-level, the K-12 and higher education policy arenas are similar in that they involve many of the same policy participants like the President of the United States, the Department of Education, and advocacy groups such as the Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation. K-12 and higher education policy arenas also share similarly high stakes associated with victory in the policy battles.

Ravitch is uniquely positioned to provide testimony to the effects of narrative on policy. As assistant secretary of education during the administration of President George H. W. Bush, Ravitch was in charge of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement (Ravitch, 2013). Ravitch was initially supportive of the educational reforms advocated in the "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) (2002) agenda. However, after observing the policy effects, Ravitch now argues that the education reform agenda has created a “false crisis narrative” (2013, p. 9).

Ravitch (2013) thoroughly refutes the data that education reformers have used to substantiate their narrative. She argues that the narrative driving "A Nation at Risk" and subsequently NCLB was that our country was at risk of losing our American standard of living because the mediocre quality of our public education system has left us unable to
compete against other nations. However, Ravitch, like others (e.g., Baker, 2007; Bracey, 2006), demonstrated the statistical errors in the data used to support the fear-inducing narrative. And yet, as Stone (2012) reminds, research on how people form their political opinions suggests that providing correct information after erroneous information does not always change people’s beliefs about the issue. So, despite substantial evidence to suggest the federal-level narrative is inaccurate, it continues to be used.

The article, *The Culture of Fear and the Politics of Education* (Ginsberg & Lyche, 2008) informs this research both conceptually and in regards to methods used. Ginsberg and Lyche identified newspaper articles from 1980 to 2000 to determine that the tone of stories is more negative than in the past. While they conclude that education is a bigger concern now than it was over the past two decades, they draw attention to the growing and sophisticated group of foundations and think tanks that are promulgating their education agendas (Ginsberg & Lyche, 2008).

The research of Ginsberg and Lyche (2008) is informative for this project because it suggests that, across the years they studied, newspaper articles became more negative. Based on their research, I might anticipate finding a negative tone about higher education in the PLA newspaper articles reviewed. However, in this study, a structural analysis of the documents is performed. In this way, the present research can extend our understanding beyond a negative/positive slant, and provide information about the narrative constructs used to frame educational agendas.

Review of historical trends in higher education narratives reveals a reliance on crisis narratives and increasing negativity. The powerful crisis narratives have permeated
the higher education policy arena for decades, and may therefore, contribute a context through which PLA policy narratives are best viewed. Historically, using crisis narratives premised on fear and concern benefit change advocacy groups. This study of PLA policy narratives may help identify if the PLA advocacy groups strategically use crisis narratives premised on fear and concern as a means to promote a sense of urgency around the policy issue.

**The Narrative Policy Framework**

Evidence supporting the value of narrative studies has continued to mount. However, the fields of public administration and policy making have not fully embraced narrative scholarship. Some scholars argue that narrative has been excluded from these disciplines as a result of an entrenched methodological paradigm (see, van Huls, 2013) centered on positivist, empirical, quantitative, and hypothesis driven research (see, Borins, 2011). The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) (Jones & McBeth, 2010) was actually created in response to the entrenched paradigm and provides a framework that supports narrative policy scholarship in a structured manner. In this way, the NPF provides an approach to narrative policy research that may be more palatable to disciplines that do not have a lengthy history of embracing narrative scholarship.

The NPF is an evolving framework of the policy process. NPF considers the role of narratives in the development, design, and implementation of public policy (Jones & McBeth, 2010). Several articles describing promising emerging policy frameworks have prominently featured NPF (examples see Petridou, 2014; Weible, et al., 2011).
There are details from the NPF origin story that are salient to this PLA research study. After the 1999 publication of Sabatier’s book *Theories of the Policy Process*, he received criticism for not including postpositivists' work. According to Jones and McBeth (2010), Sabatier (one of the original creators of the Advocacy Coalition Framework), responded that “science requires clear concepts, testable hypotheses, and falsification and that by these standards postpositivism has failed to be clear enough to be wrong” (p.331). In reaction, Jones and McBeth (2010) created the NPF based on narrative study that they argued is “clear enough to be wrong” (p.331). Despite NPF’s relative newness, the framework provides researchers an opportunity to “either confirm or fail to confirm the importance of policy narratives in policy processes” (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Lane, 2013 p. 477). Therefore, by using NPF, the intent is to generate research that is useful to the study of policy.

**NPF assumptions.**

The NPF (Jones, & McBeth, 2010) provides four test-able assumptions (Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2011). The first NPF assumption is that policy narratives play a central role in the policy process. If this assumption is valid, then in this PLA policy study, I can anticipate hearing from the policy makers, and reading in the documents, narrative elements. Identifying policy narratives involved in PLA could lend support to the assumption that narratives play a central role in the policy process. If the policy makers and documents do not contain identifiable narratives, it could suggest that narratives are not central in all policy processes.
The second NPF assumption is that policy narratives operate at the micro (individual), meso (policy subsystem), and macro (institutional/cultural) levels (Jones, & McBeth, 2010; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2011). If this assumption is valid, then in this PLA policy study, I can anticipate hearing narratives during the interviews that demonstrate their existence at the micro level. If after data analysis, there are similarities that are identifiable in the policy makers’ and the state policy documents’ narratives, then that may suggest policy narratives play a role at the meso level. If the higher education newspapers’ and advocacy groups’ documents, which are intended for the national audience, contain identifiable narratives, then comparing those narratives to the narratives (if found) at the micro and meso levels, could suggest narratives are a tool for the various levels to use in influencing other policy levels.

The third NPF assumption is that policy narratives are generated by a broad set of actors. The design of this study provides opportunity to discover narratives from Ohio state level policy makers, Ohio state level documents, higher education industry newspapers, and the advocacy groups of Lumina Foundation, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), and the American Council on Education (ACE). In total, six narrative perspectives are explored in this PLA policy study. As a result of this study design, findings from this study could potentially suggest that a broad set of actors have contributed to the narratives surrounding PLA.

The fourth NPF assumption is that policies are a translation of beliefs that are communicated through policy narratives. If this assumption is valid, then in this PLA policy study, it is anticipated that the narrative elements will reveal what the study
participants believe about PLA. To understand this assumption, it is important to consider that the study of policy narratives originated in the field of literary studies (Roe, 1994; Shanahan, Adams, & McBeth, 2013). From these beginnings, the study of policy narratives has been undertaken to explore the beliefs layered beneath the words. For example, by identifying the hero or victim in a narrative, the researcher can consider the belief implications of such role casting.

**Bias in Narrative Discourses**

Identifying the PLA policy narratives is one purpose of this study. However, to ensure contribution to the larger discussion on democracy and voice in the policy arena, this research also considers bias in the narratives. The theorizing of Robert Entman (2007) provides the conceptualization of bias used in this study. Entman’s concept of bias provides a simplistic, unifying idea for this research.

Entman (2007) argues that the concept of bias can help us integrate and understand the implications of framing, priming, and agenda-setting. Although researchers have theorized these three constructs separately, there has not been a clear distinction made between them. As a result, the terms framing, priming, and agenda setting have often been used interchangeably or in overlapping ways (Scheufele, 1999). Entman (2007) provides that framing, which shapes and alters interpretations and preferences, occurs as a result of priming. However, it is during agenda setting that the process of framing begins.

As Stone (2012) points out, conflicts arise as different groups try to create the frame of a particular policy problem. For example, a labor group might argue that a strike
they support is “not an issue of wages.” Instead, the labor group may argue the strike they support is an “issue of fairness and quality of life.” The labor group statement is an example of framing the problem and, in doing so, affecting how individuals may think and feel about the issue. The framing contest is highly consequential for both the winning and the losing group.

For some researchers, it may be important to separate concepts like framing, priming, and agenda-setting (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). It may also be important for them to dissect bias into smaller units. However, in this study, I utilize Entman’s (2007) idea that integrating these concepts is appropriate and helpful. This simplification under the umbrella term of bias provides clarity in the conclusions drawn from the data analysis.

**Contemporary Narratives of Higher Education**

It has been argued thus far in the chapter that nested layers of narratives impact perceptions of higher education policy. Through bias, the narratives may effect the democratic participation in higher education policy making. Historical narratives may provide a lens through which to view higher education policy, but as scholars, we should additionally consider how the contemporary narratives may influence the PLA policy issue.

**The Completion Agendas narratives.**

The Completion Agendas (Obama, 2009; OBR, nd.; Lumina Foundation, 2009) are currently impacting the higher education policy arena (see for example, Humphrey, 2012). Pertinent to this research project, is the effect these agendas may have on the
expansion of PLA. By reviewing the premises of the completion agendas, this research considers how their narratives may provide a policy frame that is benefiting PLA advocates.

President Obama (2009), the Lumina Foundation (2009), and the state of Ohio (University System of Ohio Board of Regents, nd) have each created Completion Agendas. Completion agendas have focused a great deal of policy force toward student completion rates (Russell, 2011). The agenda set by the President and Department of Education is centered around the goal of increasing by 50 percent the number of Americans with a postsecondary certificate, credential, or degree by 2020 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The goal set by the Lumina Foundation is to have 60 percent of Americans with a college degree, certificate, or other credential by 2025 (Lumina Foundation, 2013). The goal for Complete College Ohio is to increase the number of graduates to meet Ohio’s workforce needs which estimates suggest will require as much as a 10% increase in graduates (University System of Ohio Board of Regents, nd).

Creators of the completion agendas assert that they are premised on a few key arguments. According to the Lumina Foundation (2013), the completion agendas are based on economic, social, and equity arguments for increasing the number of individuals in the U.S. who have degrees and certificates. But as Stone (2002, 2012) asserts, there is tremendous power gained by defining the policy problem.

The economic argument for increasing the number of individuals with a degree or certificate is multi-pronged (Lumina Foundation, 2013). One assertion is that the U.S. is
facing a shortage of skilled, knowledge-workers now and in the coming years that will impact our nation’s economic strength. Another assertion is that even during the recent economic depression, unemployment effected workers without higher education credentials more than those with credentials. Another economic assertion is that there is growth in jobs requiring diplomas or credentials and therefore the economy could improve if these jobs were filled.

The social argument for increasing the number of individuals with a degree or certificate is premised on the assertion that there are increases in health, voter participation, and volunteering. Additionally, the social argument is based on the assertion that higher education attainment improves ability to engage in the complex, global, knowledge society (Lumina Foundation, 2013). These benefits then are argued to improve communities and the greater society in which we live.

The equity argument for increasing the number of individuals with a degree or certificate is premised on the assertion that certain groups of individuals are not experiencing educational success at the same levels as other groups of individuals. Attainment gaps are related to gender, race and ethnicity, first-generational college student status, and immigration status. These attainment gaps are then argued to preclude the goal of having 60% of Americans with a degree or certificate by 2025 (Lumina, 2013).

The rhetorical beauty in the framing of the completion agendas is that there are few who would disagree with the benefit of having more students graduate from higher education. Many higher education professionals share in this desire to have more students
successfully graduate. However, disagreements arise with the syllogistic reasoning applied to these commonly agreed upon premises.

More than 25 centuries ago, Aristotle argued the importance of syllogism in persuasion. A syllogism is a deductive argument based on a group of premises that lead to conclusions (West & Turner, 2014). Syllogisms can structure an argument and help the creator of the syllogism be more persuasive. West and Turner (2014) provide a classic example of a syllogism: “Major premise: All people are mortal. Minor premise: Aristotle is a person. Conclusion: Therefore, Aristotle is mortal” (p.328).

But syllogisms are not always accurate. Consider the following example: Major premise: Too many people around the world are starving. Minor premise: Restaurants serve food. Conclusion: We should build more restaurants. The obvious flaw in the syllogism is that more restaurants cannot by themselves increase the food supply. When we want to be persuasive, syllogisms help us organize our argument so others can easily follow our logic. When we want to critique rhetoric, syllogisms help us identify logical fallacies.

From the major premise of the completion agendas, advocacy groups have created a syllogism that requires scrutiny: Completion Agenda major premise: We want more students to graduate from higher education particularly among underrepresented student groups. Minor premise: PLA will help more students graduate. Conclusion: Therefore, we should expand the use of PLA. While there may be ample agreement on the desire for more graduates, the rest of the argument is unsupported. Before higher education decision
makers could logically make the conclusion that PLA should be expanded, there would need to be evidence supporting the minor premise.

The completion agendas are rhetorically constructed on non-controversial premises. There is almost universal support for the goal of helping more students achieve. However, supporting a mission of helping as many students as possible graduate does not mean that there should be blind support for just any plan that is said to contribute to the mission. If PLA will help more students graduate, then that evidence should exist. If there is not clear evidence that suggests PLA will contribute to the goal of helping students achieve, then it may suggest that the narrative surrounding PLA is more influential than the evidence.

It is also worth noting that there are potentially conflicting priorities revealed in the completion agenda narratives that may influence the interpretations of PLA. Completion agendas prioritize graduation as the reflection of student achievement. However, simply having more students graduate will not necessarily yield the presumed “payoff” of graduation if the students are not truly better educated at the completion of the process. Stated another way, if graduation is the prioritized goal for students, then student learning is removed from the narrative of higher education. The higher education policies and practices that are harmonious with a narrative that prioritizes graduation may not be the policies and practices that are harmonious with a narrative that prioritizes student learning.
Prior learning assessment research.

In this research, PLA serves as a sample policy issue through which to study policy narratives. PLA provides an appropriate sample policy issue because it has critics (Public Agenda, 2013), is receiving increased policy attention in Ohio and nationally (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013), and could be highly consequential to both sides of the policy issue. Here, the research on PLA is reviewed to evaluate the strength of the research that may inform policy makers and also to evaluate if the research is ultimately woven into the PLA policy narratives.

Considered collectively, the majority of scholarship on PLA is of a theoretical and practical nature, and few researchers have provided empirical studies of PLA (Stenlund, 2010). In a study concerning the validity of PLA, Stenlund (2010) provided a table of the reviewed literature that was divided into two large categories of theoretical and empirical studies and then subdivided further. Among the “Theoretical Studies,” the scholarship is subdivided into categories dealing with procedures, theoretical models/perspectives, and critique and quality (Stenlund, 2010). Among the “Empirical Studies,” the scholarship is subdivided into categories dealing with the evaluation and experience of practice, the perceived experience, and comparisons of PLA students with students that had formal qualifications (Stenlund, 2010). The theoretical studies outnumbered the empirical studies, 35 to 15.

There are few empirical studies to inform research on PLA. Albeit limited, the existing empirical literature does contribute to our understanding of PLA. However, there are significant and concerning issues not yet addressed.
The largest PLA study to date was conducted by CAEL (2010). CAEL reviewed data from over 62,000 students from 48 postsecondary institutions and discovered that students who received PLA credits had higher graduation and persistence rates than adult students who did not receive PLA credits. Specifically, 43% of PLA students went on to receive their bachelor’s degree compared to the 15% bachelor’s attainment of the other adult students (CAEL, 2010). Also, 13% of the PLA students received their associate’s degree compared to only 6% of those adults who did not earn any credits through PLA (CAEL, 2010). However, the researcher rightfully points out that there are numerous contributing factors of success that could not be accounted for in this study. There are also significant methodological limitations.

The CAEL study (2010) compared adult PLA recipients against adult students who did not get PLA credit. Structuring the comparison like that assumed that the adult students were the same except for the PLA credit earned. However, researchers have identified that students who earn certain types of PLA are distinctly different than other students.

For example, students who take Advanced Placement (AP) courses and exams are largely from affluent K-12 school districts (Jaschik, 2013; Mulhere, 2014). More males than females pass the AP exams (U.S. Department of Education, Office For Civil Rights, 2012). AP scores have been shown to have predictive value on student persistence (Jaschik, 2013). And simply stated, the students who pass AP exams are well prepared for college (National Center for Educational Achievement, 2010).
PLA credit is also awarded for College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams. Moulder, Abdulla, and Morgan (2005) found that students who earned CLEP credit earned higher grades in subsequent courses than students who did not earn CLEP credit. The researchers suggest that motivation likely plays a part. When Barry (2013) compared CLEP and non-CLEP earners, she found that CLEP earners graduate sooner, and have higher GPAs.

Another form of PLA credit is awarded for the creation of a portfolio, and the portfolio process highly privileges students that write well (Kamenetz, 2011). Given that strong writing skills are predictive of university grades (Preiss, Castillo, Grigorenko, & Manzi, 2013), success may be more attributable to writing skill than to PLA credit. Therefore, when we, as higher education scholars, consider AP, CLEP and portfolio credit-earners, it appears there is evidence suggesting that those students may be significantly different than non-PLA earners.

Another serious limitation of the CAEL (2010) study is that CAEL purposively selected institutions that met their pre-determined criteria. This “non-probability sampling procedure” (CAEL, 2010), makes findings from this study non-generalizable. Although, the findings have been shared and used without attention to this limitation (i.e., U.S. Department of Education, 2011), even the study’s limitation section announces it.

The second large empirical study that is helpful to consider was conducted by Aarts et al. (1999). In this longitudinal study, the researchers tracked 3,519 PLA learners and 11,785 traditional learners for four years. The researchers provided a view of PLA recipients. Their results suggest that 65% of PLA earners are female. This finding is
important because the completion agendas’ efforts are trying to address the low rate of male students’ persistence (Lumina Foundation, 2013).

Another student characteristic that the Aarts et al. (1999) study illuminated was the age of PLA recipients. Surprising to the researchers was that the largest single age category of PLA recipients was the 20 to 24-year range. This finding is important because the U.S. Department of Education, and CAEL have both positioned PLA as a tool geared to aid adult (over 25) students.

Aarts et al. (1999) discovered that PLA recipients had higher course passing rates, slightly higher GPAs, and higher graduation rates than traditional students. The authors suggest that their findings reveal who is and is not finding their way to PLA options on campuses.

One unique contribution of the Aarts et al. (1999) study was a review of costs associated with PLA. Because they found a low number of PLA programs and students, the researchers concluded that there were, “disturbing signals that delivery of assessments in its current form has not been economical for most institutions” (Aarts, et al., 1999, p. 70). This is an important contribution to our understanding of PLA, because there is scarce information about the cost-effectiveness of PLA. And from a policy perspective, it is a finding that might suggest more information is necessary.

These two large empirical studies on PLA demonstrate that the students who receive PLA are not only “not typical,” but they are also seemingly not the same student groups that the completion agendas argue must graduate in higher numbers. So, why have
advocacy groups championed PLA as a solution to the challenge of graduating more adults?

Additionally, these two empirical studies contribute to the motivation behind research into PLA policy narratives because they both excluded from their studies the students who failed in their attempts to earn PLA credit. This is a problem with the institutional data that is available for PLA studies. Most institutions do not track unsuccessful PLA attempts. Without this data, questions remain about the potential negative effects that could occur from increasing the use of PLA options. From a very basic policy creation level, policy makers are urged to gain an understanding of the “pros and cons” associated with a potential policy. If, as researchers, we do not know how many students are excluded from PLA options, and the demographics of the denied students, then we cannot convincingly argue that we are not hurting students (or at least some segments of students) by increasing PLA use. Scholars simply do not know from the existing research.

It is also important to note that the empirical studies are mainly descriptive. In other words, the studies describe the students and their general level of educational attainment. However, the empirical studies have not demonstrated that the students actually learn or grow developmentally from PLA.

The largest empirical studies suggest that scholars still have much to learn about PLA. The general scarcity of empirical evidence on PLA necessitates including smaller PLA studies for consideration. Although the studies are smaller, they can inform our understanding of PLA.
From a study of 34 PLA programs, Hoffman, Travers, Evans, and Treadwell (2009) were able to identify “five best practices that, when in place, gave students greater opportunities to utilize prior learning assessed credits” (Travers, 2013, p. 54). This study considered correlations between institutional elements and the numbers of PLA participants. Their results suggest that institutional mission, support, PLA program parameters, professional development, and a PLA program evaluation process can all impact the use of PLA at an institution. Their study can be helpful to practitioners; however, the researchers approached the study with the assumption that PLA use should be increased. Therefore, the researchers did not critically examine whether or not PLA should be increased. It assumed increased PLA use is a positive thing and then studied how institutional elements could impact the increase.

In another comparative study of institutions’ PLA approaches, Conrad and McGreal (2012) reviewed 31 post-secondary institutions across 10 countries. These researchers utilized data gathered from institutional websites and policy documents to study the different approaches, the cost-effectiveness of different PLA programs, and also which approaches preserve quality. Conrad and McGreal discovered great variety between institutional approaches to PLA. However, what was consistent across institutions was the universal recognition that the practice is labor-intensive and requires rigorous assessment.

Unlike most others, the Conrad and McGreal (2012) article incorporated a rare piece of literature that is more critical of PLA. They included the work of Harris (2000) who argued that PLA is highly affected by power and politics within institutions. Conrad
and McGreal argued that Harris’s findings over a decade before them may help explain why their study found great variety across institutional approaches to PLA.

Researchers Joosten-ten, Brinke, Sluijsmans, and Jochems (2009) utilized a two-questionnaire method to uncover the perceptions of quality in PLA assessment. Their results suggest that departmental differences exist in the perceptions of quality. In their study, the educational studies department felt better about PLA than did the computer science department. While the study included only one institution and small numbers of students, tutors, and assessors, finding a difference between departmental perceptions may suggest that PLA is not considered equally across an institution.

Stenlund (2010) reviewed PLA research across a 17-year span (1990-2007). She reviewed the PLA literature in relation to the concept of validity. Stenlund used four aspects of validity to critique PLA research. As a result of her critique, Stenlund argues that much more empirical evidence is necessary to address reliability and validity issues associated with PLA.

Stenlund (2010) provides several important findings that can inform this study of PLA policy narratives. She contends that PLA research does not demonstrate that trustworthiness of the practices underpinning PLA is questioned. Across the expanse of PLA research that Stenlund analyzed, there was a dearth of research that considered the trustworthiness of PLA practices. According to Stenlund, researchers to date have not addressed concerns about the reliability of PLA. Therefore, in the absence of reliability evidence, policymakers may be relying on policy narratives to support PLA expansion.
Another issue not yet addressed by PLA researchers is an understanding of the negative social consequences. Stenlund (2010) argues that “political and economic aspects most likely affect APL [PLA] and its quality, and so far the consequences of these aspects have not been examined” (p. 794). This proposed research into policy narratives may begin to respond to Stenlund’s call for research into the political and economic aspects of PLA.

American Council on Education conducted another informative study (Ryu, 2013). The origins of PLA in the U.S.A. can be traced back to the American Council on Education (ACE) evaluating military experience and awarding credit to military personnel as far back as 1945 (Travers, 2012). ACE continues to evaluate and make credit recommendations on behalf of their military clients. However, they also evaluate and make credit recommendations for courses, exams, and certifications that were offered by professional associations, apprenticeships, government agencies, or employers (Ryu, 2013).

To be clear about the role of ACE credit recommendations, it is important to understand that just because ACE recommends a student receive credit (based on the ACE review criteria) that does not mean that institutions will award that credit. And many institutions do not award credit for all the different types of prior learning assessments ACE makes recommendations for. For example, while 77 percent of institutions responding accept ACE-evaluated military training credits, only 26 percent indicated that they accept ACE-evaluated corporate training (Ryu, 2013).
In a 2013 study, ACE responded to what the study’s author (Ryu) referred to as a growing “demand for more and better information about their [adult nontraditional students] actual experiences of gaining credit for prior learning” (p. 1) by conducting an exploratory survey. ACE surveyed students who sought PLA credit, college administrators at institutions that award PLA credits, and companies that sponsor employee education programs. Again, the methodology choices suggest limitations for the findings. By only including students who received credit recommendations, institutions that accept the ACE recommendations, and the corporate clients that are involved with ACE, there is concern that the participants were not representative of the larger higher education arena.

With the limitations noted, the ACE (2013) survey showed the majority of participants seeking PLA credit tended to be “middle-aged, white, female, employed full time, without a baccalaureate degree, and currently enrolled in college” (Ryu, 2013, p. 3). Also of note in this study was that while 59 percent of the participants were seeking PLA credit to help them earn a bachelor’s degree, a full 21 percent were seeking PLA credit to help them earn a graduate degree. These findings again suggest that students who are seeking PLA credit are in many ways not the students PLA advocates are describing as who will be helped by PLA.

The ACE (2013) study also suggests concerns about PLA credits may be warranted. Ryu (2013) writes that, “Even when prior learning is recognized as academic credit, the actual benefit of the resulting credit may be somewhat limited. Institutions that implement CPL [PLA] tend to grant elective course credit rather than general education
This finding also runs counter to the completion agenda’s purpose for PLA. This finding does not suggest that PLA is helping students gain credits for graduation purposes.

The empirical evidence demonstrating that PLA will help institutions, states, and the nation generate more college-level graduates might be viewed by some as limited, and nonexistent to others. However, that has not deterred the many theoretical arguments for the use of PLA.

Knowledge of the theoretical arguments that are used to encourage the use of PLA can inform this proposed study. Anya Kamenetz has contributed several books and articles espousing the benefits of PLA for the transformation of higher education. *Generation Debt* (2006) and *DIYU* (2010) are two of her most notable works that argue for significant redesign of higher education practices. The basic premise is that college has become too expensive for the student-consumer and either higher education can make affordability changes or there will be “disruptive innovation” (Kamenetz, 2010, p. 98) from external entities. One of the innovations Kamenetz views as helpful for higher education is increasing the use of PLA (Kamenetz, 2011).

To understand the importance of PLA, Kemenetz (2011) writes that, “we must stipulate two truths: most students don’t start and finish at the same college, and lots of important learning takes place outside school” (p. 8). Let’s consider each of those stipulations with regard to PLA.

The first Kemenetz (2011) “truth” is that “most students don’t start and finish at the same college” (p. 8) and therefore portable credits will better serve the student. This
argument is unclear as it pertains to PLA. For students to have more portable credits, the argument should be for more articulation and transfer agreements. In the state of Ohio for example, the portability of credits is addressed through a Transfer Assurance Guide (TAG) and policy.

Through the TAG process, all public state institutions have calibrated, through peer-review, particular courses (often general requirement courses) to be equivalent across all public institutions. When students take a TAG course in Ohio, they know that those course credits will transfer to any other public institution in the state (Ohio Board of Regents, 2012). Therefore, articulation and transfer agreements more appropriately address the issue of student-mobility than increasing the use of PLA would. In reality, increasing the use of PLA before articulation and transfer agreements are in place could be detrimental to student-mobility.

The second Kemenetz (2011) “truth” is that “lots of important learning takes place outside school” (p. 8) and therefore it should be recognized within the formal learning structure of higher education. She supports this contention with information from Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010) that “65 percent of postsecondary learning, by spending, does not happen through colleges and universities but through workplace and other training” (Kemenetz, 2011). This argument is also unclear as it pertains to increasing PLA. When reading their full report, Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010) assert that workers with the most education receive the most training. Therefore, if the intention of PLA is to translate the learning from workplace training into credentialed college credit, then the largest potential beneficiaries will be those workers who already
have a college education. This appears to be a better argument for the use of PLA in graduate school than it does for the intent of the completion agendas, which is to increase the number of individuals with degrees or certificates.

Another important consideration with regard to Kemenetz’s (2011) “truth” that “lots of important learning takes place outside school” (p. 8) is that lots of “important learning” has little to do with college subject matter. For example, during one’s military service, knowledge of ammunitions is critical. I am not aware of any university course on ammunitions. The point is, workplace or military training often times has a different purpose than traditional higher education. When discussing the difference between workplace and formal learning, Stenlund (2010) offers that,

Information learning does not fit very well with the view of knowledge in formal education, and learners are often unaware of, for example the depth and range of their formal learning. Informal learning is also vastly contextual in contrast to formal education which owns a privileged generality (p. 788).

There are often important distinctions to acknowledge between workplace learning and college-level learning.

Another theoretical argument that is presented by several authors (Kemenetz, 2011; Klein-Collins, & Wertheim, 2013; Travers, 2012b) is that PLA can help capture the learning that occurs from free, on-line resources. Again, the “devil is in the details” on this theoretical argument. The students who enroll in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are different than what some people may realize. The largest percentage of MOOC participants is over the age of 51 and already highly educated (Alcorn,
Christensen, & Emanuel, 2014). The calls to increase the use of PLA were based on the assertion that it would help address the goal of the completion agendas. The completion agendas assert that the target number of graduates cannot be reached if higher education does not increase the attainment rates of adults and minority students. Therefore, if a significant argument for PLA is that it will help capture the learning from MOOCs, and the majority of MOOC participants already have degrees, then how can PLA be argued to positively affect the completion agendas?

The theoretical arguments for increasing the use of PLA appear to have flaws. The empirical evidence supporting the benefits of increasing the use of PLA appears to be limited. And yet, the momentum behind creating policies that will promote the increased use of PLA is growing. This may suggest the importance of critiquing the narrative surrounding the PLA expansion.

**Synthesis and Research Questions**

This chapter provided foundational details about the concepts used to create this research. To review, this research was approached through an instrumentalist lens, focusing on the practical value of conducting policy narrative research. The conceptual framework guiding this research was made of three interrelated concepts. The idea that communication, education, and democracy are intertwined (Dewey, 1916) contributes one leg of the conceptual framework triad. The second concept making up the conceptual framework is that policy narratives can be structurally analyzed which is provided by the NPF (Jones & McBeth, 2010). Then, the third concept of the conceptual framework is Entman’s (2007) conceptualization of bias. And the final foundational detail described in
this chapter was that the NPF provides the framework for considering the policy process in this study.

The literature reviewed in this chapter served two primary purposes. First, the literature demonstrates the importance of extending narrative research to the specific policy issue level by describing how the other layers of narrative have been explored in prior scholarship. Second, the literature suggests how each layer of narrative may impact other layers (see Figure 2) and thus, informs the final interpretations from this PLA policy narrative research.

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the role of policy narratives in the higher education policy process and to extend the testing of a new policy narrative framework to the field of higher education. PLA was selected as the sample policy issue used to consider policy narratives in this research. So, the most specific purpose of this study was to determine the PLA policy narratives, and the implications of those narratives, at the state level in Ohio, and the national level in higher education newspapers and prominent PLA advocacy groups. The first research question then was: RQ1: What narratives surround prior learning assessment policy for Ohio policy makers, higher education newspapers, and prominent PLA advocacy groups?

Another purpose of this research was to consider how the structure of policy narratives may influence democratic participation in the policy making process. To fulfill this purpose, required a two step process and two separate research questions. The first step in the process required the narrative structure to be identified. And as was described in this chapter, the NPF supports structural analysis of policy narratives. The research
question driving the identification of narrative structure was: RQ2: How are the narratives surrounding PLA policy structured?

The second step in the process was to consider the implications of the structure on democratic participation. This chapter reviewed literature that suggests metanarratives, historical and contemporary higher education narratives, and biased and asymmetrical narratives may all create restrictive frames and impact democratic participation. The research question driving consideration of democratic participation was: RQ3: What do the PLA narratives suggest about the democratic participation in higher education policy making?

Responding to the call by scholars to expand research methods in education policy scholarship (example, Bastedo, 2007), and to extend the testing of new policy narrative frameworks (example, Shanahan, McBeth, & Jones, 2014) across multiple disciplines such as education, this research is the first known attempt to use NPF in the study of higher education policy narratives. New policy frameworks may advance our theoretical knowledge and thereby improve our understanding of communication and democracy in the policy process. Thus, the fourth research question was: RQ4: What support exists for using the Narrative Policy Framework in researching higher education policy? The following chapter provides a detailed description of the methods used to address the research questions.
Chapter Three: Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the methods used to address the research questions. The appropriateness of a qualitative approach in this study is discussed first. Then, details on the overall study design are provided. An explanation of the role of the researcher is given. Next, the details regarding data sources, data collection methods, and data analysis are provided. The strategies employed to address validity are also described. The chapter concludes with acknowledgements of the limitations of this study.

Employing a Qualitative Approach

In this study, the research questions were answered through a qualitative approach. Qualitative research explores one central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this research project, the central phenomenon under consideration was policy narratives. Thus, the purpose of this study and a qualitative approach were congruent. The research questions were also congruent with a qualitative approach. Identifying narratives, narrative structure, and determining narrative voice and power, were goals of the research questions and suited to qualitative inquiry.

In this study, the desired data and the methods employed were also congruent. Qualitative research collects views of the central phenomenon in the form of words or images (Creswell, 2013). In this research, policy narrative data were collected in the form of words from interview participants, and from documents.

Traditionally, policy research utilized quantitative methods, however, there is growing awareness that new methods are needed to increase understanding of the policy arena (Bastedo, 2006, Weibel, 2014). This expansion of methods is particularly important
to better understand policies described as targeting student populations that are excluded from our current data collection practices. For example, adult students who are not “first-time, full-time” students are currently excluded in national datasets (NCES, 2012). So, policies targeting adult students may lack quantitative data to assess policy changes.

Although PLA policy attention is increasing nationally (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013), higher education scholars do not have national data on PLA. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), which is the primary federal organization responsible for collecting and analyzing education data, does not currently collect data to capture trends in PLA (GEMEnA, 2012). Although the advisory council to NCES acknowledged the use of PLA for the purpose of awarding college credits as an emerging issue (GEMEnA, 2012), NCES cannot currently provide data on the trends. Therefore, alternative sources of data are needed for a broad view of PLA. PLA policy narratives from higher education media and PLA advocacy groups are available for study and could contribute to our knowledge.

**Study Design**

To ensure coherence in a qualitative study, five research components are essential considerations (Maxwell, 2008). Maxwell (2008) asserts the goals, conceptual framework, research questions, methods, and validity of a study should have a clear relationship. In Maxwell’s conceptualization, these five components continually interact during the study. They do not simply exist in linear relationships. Thus, the design of a study is evolving throughout the project, not just at the onset.
In designing this narrative policy research project, it was appropriate to create what Maxwell (2008) refers to as a “Questions X Methods” matrix. The questions x methods matrix designed for this study is shown in Figure 3. Figure 3 shows a research plan was given to each of the four research questions. The second column shows each research question was considered in relationship to the study’s purpose, and how validity aspects were planned for. The third column shows the data sources most appropriate to the study. The fourth column shows the decisions about the data collection methods. As Maxwell (2008) emphasizes, the decisions represented in the columns should continually interact. In this study design, consideration of validity was continuous. For example, to ensure triangulation, which addresses validity through an integration of multiple methods and sources (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2008), seven data sources and two methods (interviews and document analysis) were used.

The final column in Figure 3 shows the decisions related to the data analysis. Again, congruence with the purpose of the study and the data sources was considered. Additionally, the concern for validity influenced the design for performing data analysis. One strategy to address validity is to provide quasi-statistics (Maxwell, 2008). Quasi-statistics are simple numerical results that support research conclusions (Maxwell, 2008). In this study, the creation of a data spreadsheet allowed for the capture of quasi-statistical support for findings. This type of information addresses validity concerns because it communicates the amount of evidence that suggests a specific finding in this policy narrative research.
More details about the decisions made in designing this study are contained throughout this chapter. However, the goal in providing the questions x methods matrix is to illustrate that congruence across all study components was considered in designing this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Justification (Why do I need to know this?)</th>
<th>Data Source Selection</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: What narratives surround prior learning assessment policy for Ohio policy makers, higher education newspapers, and prominent PLA advocacy groups?</td>
<td>To assess if PLA policy narratives are identifiable</td>
<td>Ohio state level policy makers</td>
<td>Interviews of Ohio state level policy makers</td>
<td>Both inductive and deductive coding of interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To provide state and national views of PLA policy narratives</td>
<td>Ohio state level documents</td>
<td>OBR website</td>
<td>Use of coding sheet (30 elements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Validity: To triangulate findings from multiple sources</td>
<td>Inside Higher Ed documents</td>
<td>Inside Higher Ed website</td>
<td>Creation of findings spreadsheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Validity: To consider transferability</td>
<td>The Chronicle of Higher Education documents</td>
<td>The Chronicle of Higher Education website</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CAEL documents</td>
<td>CAEL website</td>
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<td>Lumina Foundation documents</td>
<td>Lumina Foundation website</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ2: How are the narratives surrounding PLA policy structured?</td>
<td>To assess trends in narrative structure</td>
<td>All 7 Sources Listed Above</td>
<td>All 7 Data Collection Methods Listed Above</td>
<td>All 3 Data Analysis Methods Listed Above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To consider voice and power</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Validity: To consider quasi-statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ3: What do the PLA narratives suggest about the democratic participation in higher education policy making?</td>
<td>To consider the diversity of stakeholder participation in policy making</td>
<td>All 7 Sources Listed Above</td>
<td>All 7 Data Collection Methods Listed Above</td>
<td>All 3 Data Analysis Methods Listed Above</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ4: What support exists for using the Narrative Policy Framework in researching higher education policy?</td>
<td>To assess the potential of using NPF in higher education research</td>
<td>Coding sheets</td>
<td>Researcher work product</td>
<td>Review and evaluation of all data from coding sheets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3: “Questions X Methods Matrix” (adapted from Maxwell, 2008) Displaying Study Design*
Role of the Researcher

Through the entire qualitative research process, the researcher herself is a key instrument (Creswell, 2013). To generate trustworthy research, a qualitative researcher must examine her personal beliefs and make plans to mitigate the influence her beliefs could have on the study. The researcher ensures, through examination and preparation, that her study reveals more about the study’s subject than it reveals about the researcher’s personal bias (Mehra, 2002).

The inextricable nature of the researcher and her beliefs affects every stage of qualitative research. My beliefs influenced my decision to embark on a policy study. As Mehra (2002) writes,

A researcher’s personal beliefs and values are reflected not only in the choice of methodology and interpretation of findings, but also in the choice of a research topic. In other words, what we believe in determines what we want to study (p. 5).

I recognize the importance of policy studies. Professionally, I spent almost 15 years as a corporate training consultant. I saw first-hand how policies can differentiate organizations from one another. Then, six years ago I began serving on the board of a local K-12 school district. Through this role, I gained exposure to education policies that are created at the state and federal level and that affect the lives of local students, teachers and administrators. As a result of these professional experiences, I believe that policies are highly affecting and that studying what influences policy creation and implementation is valuable to scholars and educators. Therefore, I knowingly placed policy in a primary role when approaching this research.
The study design reflects my attempts to mitigate the likelihood that my personal beliefs would overshadow my inquiry during this study. For example, during data analysis, my role was to code the interviews and documents in as consistent a manner as possible regardless of which policy side is represented. Having a consistent coding sheet to apply to each data source supported my efforts to analyze the data in as unbiased a fashion as possible.

This research required embracing the subjective interpretations that accompany my role as policy narrative researcher. Through examination and preparation, I strove to limit the influence of my personal beliefs on this research project. I reflected on my personal beliefs for the duration of this study. I strove to apply identical standards of critique to the narrative data irrespective of the policy stance communicated. In doing so, my aim was to discover possible answers to the research questions and fulfill my role as a trustworthy researcher.

Data Sources

For this research project, data were collected from eight sources. As was presented in the questions x methods matrix that appears in Table 1, each of the sources was selected to address the research questions and thus fulfill the purpose of the study. Research questions one, two, and three each required data from the same seven data sources. Research question four required data from a source that was a researcher work product created while addressing the first three research questions. A description, and justification for selection, is provided for each of the eight data sources.
Ohio State Level

In this study, the state of Ohio was selected as the sample state. Ohio was selected because it is one of the few states engaged in a state-wide PLA policy initiative. Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Oregon, Montana, Minnesota, and Idaho are also working on statewide PLA initiatives (Hatfield Price, 2014). As one of the few states engaged in a statewide PLA initiative, Ohio may have more PLA policy narratives to include for study. Ohio was also selected as the sample state to facilitate access to interviews of policy makers. The researcher resides in Ohio, making face-to-face interviewing of Ohio policy makers possible.

In the design of this study, the decision was made to include both state and national level data sources. Having both levels of data allowed for comparisons and contrasts. Having both national and state data also allowed for nested layers of narratives to be explored.

Ohio state level documents.

The first data source selected for this study was Ohio state level documents. Having Ohio state level documents served several purposes in this study. First, the documents provided a state level view of PLA policy narratives to compare to the national level data sources. Second, the documents allowed for triangulation of the state level interview data. Collecting state level documents provided variation of both data source and method of collection. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, this triangulation of sources and methods helps address validity concerns (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2008).
Having Ohio state level documents also increased the amount of data that could be used to answer the research questions. The increased amount of data allowed quasi statistics to be considered. Additionally, the state level documents increased the amount of data that could be compared to the national level data.

**Criteria for inclusion.**

The criteria for inclusion of documents remained the same for all the sources of documents. The inclusion criteria had four components. First, the document had to be open-access, or what Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, and Lane (2013) refer to as “public consumption” documents. This means that the documents are available to any interested person. Because this study is the first to consider policy narratives associated with PLA, it was important to the researcher that the documents in this study be publicly available to ensure transparency and replicability by other researchers.

The criteria for inclusion of documents also included a stipulation on the date the document was created. The document had to be created between 2009 and August, 2015. The time span was established for two reasons. First, the starting date coincides with the announcements of the completion agendas. So, including documents that were created in the same year would allow for the consideration of the metanarrative created by the completion agendas. The second reason to have the six-year time span is because that time span also fully captures the PLA with a Purpose initiative in Ohio.

The third criterion for inclusion was that the document had to be of a length that would allow a narrative to be detected. Documents that were simply announcements were not included. For example, if a document was an announcement that a PLA advocacy
group received a grant, with no additional information provided, then the document was not included in this study.

The final criterion for inclusion was that the document had to be primarily about PLA. Documents that did not have PLA as the primary focus were excluded from study. This criterion was established because it ensured the narratives under consideration were PLA policy narratives.

The criteria for inclusion were established in an effort to ensure a broad and inclusive collection of documents. The general term “document” is used to describe the data sources for this research. However, there were many types of documents included in this policy narrative study. The types of documents included higher education trade press news articles, official state policy declarations, state policy guides, policy position articles, advocacy group policy research reports, and transcripts of speeches.

**Ohio state level policy makers.**

The second data source selected for this study was Ohio state level policy makers. Two policy makers were identified for interviewing. The policy makers were leaders at the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) which has since undergone a name change to the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE). Because the agency was OBR when I gathered data, I will use the label OBR in describing the agency here. OBR is a Cabinet level agency for the Ohio Governor that oversees higher education across the state. As was explained in Chapter One (Overview of Methods), OBR’s main responsibilities include, “developing and advocating policies to maximize higher education’s contributions to the state and its citizens” (ODHE, nd. para. 1).
Because there are many state level Ohio policy makers at OBR, the most appropriate policy makers for this research project were identified. Rubin and Rubin (2012) assert that in order to ensure accuracy and credibility, researchers must interview people who are knowledgeable on the research topic. Therefore, I purposively interviewed state level policy leaders who are directly involved with PLA with a Purpose. PLA with a Purpose is Ohio’s state-wide PLA policy initiative. The policy makers interviewed were highly familiar with the PLA with a Purpose initiative and its history.

While there is no specific requirement on the number of interview participants a researcher engages (Seidman, 2013), I interviewed two Ohio policy makers. Interviewing two PLA knowledgeable policy makers allowed for comparison and contrast of interview data. Interviewing two policy makers also allowed for increased confidence in the resulting data.

Collecting state level interview data in addition to the state level document data provided variation of both data source and method of collection. Variation of both data source and method of collection is referred to as triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2008). Validity concerns were addressed through this triangulation of sources and methods.

**Higher Education Newspapers**

Higher education newspaper documents were selected as data sources in this research project for several reasons. First, higher education newspapers were selected as data sources based on prior research findings. Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway (2011) identified that media policy narratives influence public opinion on a policy issue. This
finding suggests the importance of considering the media policy narratives on a policy issue. The decision was made to use the higher education newspapers as the media sources because they were considered by the researcher to be the sources most likely to cover issues like PLA. The higher education newspapers were also considered by the researcher to be the sources most likely to reach higher education policy makers. The third reason higher education newspapers were selected as data sources is because they provide a national level perspective on PLA policy narratives. Having national level data allows comparison with the state level data.

**Inside Higher Ed documents.**

The third data source selected for this study was the higher education newspaper, *Inside Higher Ed*. The *Inside Higher Ed* newspaper has 1.2 million unique monthly users and 5.5 million page views per month (*Inside Higher Ed*, 2015). Thirty-eight percent of their readers are administrators in key institutional areas, and 12 percent of their readers hold executive titles such as deans, vice presidents, presidents, and chancellors (*Inside Higher Ed*, 2015). This information suggests that the PLA policy narratives that appear in *Inside Higher Ed* may be read by policy makers in the field of higher education and potentially influence opinions.

**The Chronicle of Higher Education documents.**

The fourth data source selected for this study was the higher education newspaper, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has more than 64,000 academic subscriptions and a total readership of more than 315,000 (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2015). They have more than 12.8 million web pages
per month and more than 1.9 million unique viewers (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2015). As the information about the other higher education newspaper suggested, the readership information about The Chronicle of Higher Education suggests that the PLA policy narratives that appear in this paper may be read by policy makers in the field of higher education and potentially influence opinions.

**PLA Advocacy Groups**

PLA advocacy groups were selected as data sources for this research project for two primary reasons. Prior research is the first reason PLA advocacy groups were selected as data sources. There is a large body of research revealing the effects advocacy groups, often referred to as advocacy coalitions, have on policy making (see Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Weible, & Sabatier, 2014). It is important to consider the policy narratives advocacy groups create and use because research suggests they could potentially influence policy making in higher education.

The second reason PLA advocacy groups were selected as a data source is that they provide a national level view of PLA policy narratives. Having a national level view can help address a gap in understanding PLA. Agencies like NCES cannot currently provide a national view of PLA. Advocacy group documents provide one way to consider PLA from a nation-wide perspective. Having a national view of PLA policy narratives in this study also allows comparisons with the state of Ohio data.

Three PLA advocacy groups were selected as data sources. The selected advocacy groups were ACE, CAEL, and the Lumina Foundation. The advocacy groups were selected based on their involvement with PLA at the national level.
ACE documents.

ACE’s historic and current national involvement with PLA advocacy makes this group an essential source of policy narrative data. The historical development of PLA is linked to both ACE and CAEL. PLA originated in response to the surge of returning World War II veterans (Travers, 2012). ACE was involved with PLA at that time. As an organization, ACE represents the presidents of U.S. accredited two- and four-year colleges. They are a 1,700-member organization and provide active advocacy services. As ACE (2015) describes, “As the principal voice of higher education, ACE coordinates the advocacy efforts of the entire community” (p. 1). ACE has the longest history of PLA advocacy among the three included advocacy groups.

CAEL documents.

CAEL is a nationally recognized leader of PLA advocacy and was a crucial source of policy narrative data. CAEL began as a research project funded by the Carnegie Corporation under the backing of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) (Travers, 2012). In 1977, CAEL became a separate nonprofit organization and “began its first movements to organize a common agenda around assessing learning gained from experience through disciplined and quality means” (Travers, 2012, p. 44). Through millions of dollars in funding from the Lumina Foundation (the funding from Lumina to CAEL is detailed further in Chapter Four), CAEL has created an online service for assessing a student’s PLA needs called LearningCounts.org. This online service is the only one of its kind nationally. CAEL is also the advocacy group that has provided the state of Ohio assistance convening and communicating about PLA.
Lumina Foundation documents.

The history and wealth of the Lumina Foundation is relevant to the decision to include it as a data source. The Lumina Foundation started in 2000. The USA Group, which was at the time, the nation’s largest private guarantor and administrator of education loans, divested to its rival in the industry, Sallie Mae (Miller, 2007). Most of the USA Group’s board members stayed on the newly formed Lumina Foundation board and were joined by four previous members of the Student Loan Marketing Association, and two previous Sallie Mae board members. The Lumina Foundation is now a private foundation (Miller, 2007). Thus, through the sale of a student loan company and restructuring a remaining small entity into a foundation, the Lumina Foundation emerged with an endowment of over one billion dollars (Lumina Foundation, 2015).

Having an endowment of over one billion dollars makes Lumina Foundation the 15th largest private foundation in the U.S. by total assets (Picciano & Spring (2013). The Lumina Foundation strategically leverages their resources to influence policy. Reporting on the effect of powerful foundations on higher education, Parry, Field, and Supiano (2013) write, “Yet both Gates and Lumina have been candid about their plans to use their money and influence to push for policy change” (p. 1). For example, one of the Lumina Foundation’s strategic decisions includes awarding one million dollars in grants to media organizations between 2006 and 2011 to keep their goals in the national conversation (Ruark, 2013).

The Lumina Foundation has contributed millions of dollars to CAEL specifically to effect the policy and capacity of PLA at a national level (see Lumina Foundation, nd).
Lumina has also contributed one million dollars to media organizations to keep their goals in the national conversation. Because they have strategically invested in PLA and media attention, the Lumina Foundation was included as a source of data for this study of policy narratives.

**Researcher Work Product**

Research question four required a data source that was a product of the researcher’s work on the first three research questions. Research question four is: What support exists for using the Narrative Policy Framework in researching higher education policy? The spreadsheet that was created to manage the data collected from the previously described data sources was used to address this research question. By using the spreadsheet as a data source, the researcher was able to consider the breadth of the data that resulted from the study when answering RQ4.

Once the spreadsheet had been populated with the coded data from the various sources, the spreadsheet itself became an additional data source. For example, the spreadsheet affords a comprehensive view of all the data collected in this study. By viewing the data as a whole, the amount of support for the eventual conclusions was considered. Comprehensively viewing all the data collected in this study also afforded the opportunity to consider possible relationships among the core narrative elements identified in the analyzed PLA policy narratives. Therefore, the spreadsheet became a data source that provided a unique view of information to address RQ4.
**Data Collection**

In this study, data were collected from interviews and documents. The decision to use two methods of data collection was based on validity concerns. Having two data collection methods in addition to the seven distinct data sources, allowed for triangulation of the data. Reasons for the selection of each data source have already been provided in this chapter. This data collection section is to provide sufficient detail to allow another researcher to replicate this study. The purpose of providing step-by-step details is to improve transparency and replicability.

**Interviews.**

Prior to conducting interviews, I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this study. The IRB approval is Appendix A. The IRB approval was granted to conduct semi-structured interviews, audiotape the interviews, and transcribe the interviews without names or identifiers associated with the participants. The IRB approved consent form to participate in the interviews is Appendix B.

An interview protocol was used to ensure consistency and quality. The IRB approved interview protocol is Appendix C. The interview protocol provided a script that ensured I described consistently the study and the steps I would take to protect the confidentiality of each participant. The protocol also provided the main questions I asked each participant. Rubin and Rubin (2012) describe the three types of interview questions as: main questions, follow-up questions, and probes. Planning and scripting the main interview questions was important to address data quality.
Care was taken to design open-ended questions aligned with the purposes of this study. Again, every question I asked the Ohio policy makers is included in the interview protocol found in Appendix C. The design of the interview questions was informed by several factors. First, the purpose of the study was reflected in the interview questions. For example, the questions are centered on PLA. Second, the interview questions were designed to elicit narrative elements that would allow for comparison between interview participants’ responses as well as narrative elements found in PLA documents. For example, the policy makers were asked, “Who or what presents the most opposition to prior learning assessment?” This type of question was designed to consider if a narrative villain is consistently identified when policy makers discuss PLA. Additionally, the interview questions were designed to be neutral and balanced. For example, the policy makers were asked both for their opinions on the benefits of PLA as well as the challenges it may present. Overall, the interview questions were designed to support the purposes of this study by eliciting open, conversational participant responses about PLA in Ohio.

Two Ohio state level policy makers who worked for OBR were interviewed in this study. After identifying the two most appropriate policy makers to interview, interview appointments were scheduled through a process of phone calls and emails. Each participant was interviewed in his or her office at OBR. The interviews were conducted using the interview protocol and they were audio recorded.
After the interviews were complete, the audio recordings were professionally transcribed. When the transcriptions were received by the researcher, they were compared to the original interview recordings to verify accuracy.

**Documents.**

Two steps preceded collecting documents for this study. First, the data sources were identified. Then, the inclusion criteria for the documents was created.

As previously discussed, there were six distinct sources of documents used in this study. One document source provided the Ohio state level data. Two document sources provided the higher education newspaper data. Three document sources provided the PLA advocacy group data.

The inclusion criteria for documents was discussed in the Data Source section of this chapter. However, I restate here that the four criteria included that the document be: 1) open-access, 2) created between 2009, and August 2015, 3) of a length to allow a narrative to be detected, and 4) have PLA as the primary focus.

Satisfying the study design and the inclusion criteria, all the documents were collected from the website of the specified source. The step-by-step details of how the documents were accessed on each source website is provided in Appendix D. The goal of including such specific detail is to support other scholars in replicating or verifying this research.

Documents from Lumina Foundation, ACE, and both higher education newspapers were identified through intra-website search capabilities. Documents from CAEL and OBR were identified through their respective website homepage tabs. To
ensure the maximum number of PLA documents would be collected from the data
sources, searches were conducted using the search terms “prior learning assessment” and
also using “credit for prior learning.”

**Data Analysis**

After collecting data from the identified sources, the researcher analyzed the data. The interview data were analyzed using two methods. The documents were analyzed using one method.

*Interview data analysis.*

After interviews with Ohio state level policy makers were conducted, the transcribed accounts of the interviews became raw data through which to consider the narratives that surround PLA policy. The process of analyzing narrative data involves coding the raw data. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) define it, coding is “finding and labeling the concepts, themes, events, and examples in your transcripts that speak to your research question” (p. 190).

*Coding sheet.*

The interview transcriptions were coded twice with two distinct methods. The first coding of the Ohio policy maker transcripts was completed deductively using the coding sheet included in Appendix E. As Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) describe, deductive coding “comes from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas, and/or key variables that the researcher brings to the study” (p. 81). The coding sheet yielded 30 data points for each interview.
The coding sheet used in this study was adapted from previous NPF research. The authors of two previous studies using NPF have published their coding sheets (McBeth, Clemons, Husmann, Kusko, & Gaarden, 2014; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Lane, 2013). The published coding sheets help capture narrative policy elements such as characters, story type, causal mechanisms, problem surfing, use of evidence, cost and benefit story, and the policy stance. Modifications were made to the coding sheet to reflect this study of PLA policy narratives.

There were several reasons for adapting a coding sheet used by other researchers. The first reason was that the coding sheets were created following the principles associated with narrative policy analysis (Roe, 1994). This research project was also designed around the principles associated with narrative policy analysis, so the elements on the coding sheet and the intent of this project were in agreement.

The second reason for adapting a coding sheet used by other researchers was to improve the comparability across NPF research. Using the published coding sheets allows this PLA policy study to inform the broader policy theory discussions about the usefulness of NPF because it contains similar language.

The third reason for adapting a coding sheet used by other researchers was to ensure a breadth of policy narrative data would be collected. The coding sheets were published by two of the theorists (referring to Mark McBeth and Elizabeth Shanahan) most recognized for the creation and advancement of NPF. Using their coding sheets as models ensured this research appropriately considered the breadth of narrative elements that have been relevant in other policy studies.
The process of adapting the coding sheets of prior NPF scholars involved several steps. First, I compared the published coding sheets against one another and determined the coding elements included in the coding sheet created by McBeth, Clemons, Husmann, Kusko, and Gaarden (2014) more closely matched the purposes of this study than did the coding sheet created by Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, and Lane (2013). However, there was one coding element concerning “problem surfing” (this concept is explained in Chapter Four) that appeared exclusively in the Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, and Lane coding sheet and I included that element in the coding sheet used for this research. Therefore, the coding sheet used in this study most closely resembles the coding sheet created by McBeth, Clemons, Husman, Kusko, and Gaarden, but it has an element included from the other previously published coding sheet.

The second step in adapting the coding sheets of prior NPF scholars for use in this study involved modifying the wording of the coding sheet. The wording was modified to reflect the policy subject under study. In this case, PLA. For example, the first core story element included in the coding sheet concerns the hero/ally. On the published coding sheet (McBeth, Clemons, Husmann, Kusko, & Gaarden, 2014), there were five identified categories of hero all pertaining to the policy area under study in their research. The previous researchers identified hero categories such as business/industry, conservationists, government, and cultural/historical concerns (McBeth, Clemons, Husmann, Kusko, & Gaarden, 2014). On the coding sheet used in this study, I identified six categories of hero based on my reading of PLA, higher education, and policy literature. My hero categories included bureaucracy concern, PLA champion, completion-
agenda champion, higher education quality champion, faculty member, and student. Therefore, while the narrative policy elements included on the coding sheet remained consistent from the previously published sheet and my coding sheet (such as hero, villain, victim, etc.), the categories within the elements reflect the literature and policy forces appropriate for this PLA narrative research.

**Inductive coding.**

The second coding of Ohio policy maker transcripts was performed inductively. The transcripts were read in their entirety multiple times. First Cycle and Second Cycle (Saldaña, 2013) coding was performed. During the first cycle, *In Vivo* coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) was performed. In Vivo coding uses the interview participant’s words or phrases. For every section of the interview transcript, the participant’s research-relevant words and phrases were captured in the margin. Then, the second cycle coding occurred. Second cycle coding is a way of grouping the codes that emerged from the first cycle into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

**Document data analysis.**

Data analysis of the documents was consistent across all six sources. The first reading of each document was to determine if it met the four inclusion criteria. If the document met the criteria, the document was then read a second time. The second reading was to consider the document in its entirety. This reading allowed the researcher to reflect on the overall message of the document. Then, the third reading was to identify the narrative policy elements. During the third reading, the coding sheet was completed.
After each coding sheet was completed for a document, the data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet helped manage the data for this study. The spreadsheet contained a column for each of the 30 data elements on the coding sheet as well as columns for document identifiers. Using the spreadsheet supported the creation of quasi-statistics for most of the coded elements. It also supported the synthesizing and analyzing of the open response elements.

**Validity**

Validity concerns were addressed with several strategies in this research project. The first strategy to address validity was the use of a study design. As Maxwell (2008) discusses, the design of a study is one of the primary ways to address validity. The question x matrix table that was presented earlier in this chapter demonstrates where decisions were made with regard to validity. Having each element of the study design aligned with the other elements is a strategy to address validity.

The second strategy to address validity was to use quasi-statistics. Quasi-statistics are simple numerical results that support research conclusions (Maxwell, 2008). Quasi-statistics communicate the amount of data that supports the findings in study. This type of numerical information helps the researcher accurately describe trends in the study data.

Validity was also addressed through the use of triangulation of data. Triangulation addresses validity through an integration of multiple methods and sources (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2008). Designing the study with seven data sources and two methods (interviews and document analysis) ensured triangulation was possible.
Triangulation of data addresses validity because it helps researchers identify when data is inconsistent or isolated and should perhaps be considered uniquely.

Additional details concerning triangulation in this study are noteworthy. First, the interviews conducted with Ohio policy makers indicated that the state policy makers rely on CAEL for PLA information. Then, review of the Ohio state level documents revealed that CAEL and ACE are both influential sources of PLA information for Ohio. Next, review of CAEL and ACE documents reveal a link to the Lumina Foundation through grant funding. Finally, review of higher education newspapers reveals a reliance on CAEL for PLA information, and again, CAEL received generous funding from Lumina Foundation. Therefore, the triangulation, or connected relationships among the data sources, was considered to address issues of validity.

The fourth strategy to address validity was to consider transferability. Transferability is whether the findings from a study are able to be generalized beyond the specifics of the originating study (Guba, & Lincoln, 1989). In this study, transferability was considered when the design decision was made to include national level data sources. The Ohio state level data may or may not be generalizable to other states. Every state differs in its higher education governing structure and their engagement with PLA policy initiatives. However, the national level policy narratives created by the higher education newspapers and the PLA advocacy groups have implications across all the states. Therefore, including national level PLA narratives addresses concerns of transferability.
Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the inclusion criterion establishing the time span in which a document had to be created (2009 to August, 2015) may have impacted the study’s findings. The inclusion criterion was established to try to capture the current growth trend occurring in PLA policy. However, PLA has been around for over 65 years (Travers, 2012). If the time span of the study were expanded, it would allow the researcher to consider if this is the first time there has been growth or if there have been growth spurts in the past.

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) suggests that while the political process generally results in stability and incrementalism, it occasionally produces large-scale change (Baumgartner, Jones, & Mortensen, 2014). Through the lens of PET, PLA may simply be experiencing an anticipated spike in attention before it stabilizes again. Studying a longer time span might have helped identify if PLA policy growth had surged previously.

In the future, changing the inclusion criterion and expanding the time span in which a document had to be created could help identify if PLA policy growth is happening for the first time, or has happened in the past. Knowledge of whether PLA policy growth surged before could raise important questions about the use of PLA policy narratives in historical growth spurts in addition to the contemporary growth.

Another known limitation in this study concerns the inclusion criterion that a document be primarily about PLA. The purpose of this criterion was to ensure that the
policy narratives included in the study were about PLA. However, that decision may have obscured important narrative details about PLA.

By excluding documents that were not primarily about PLA (but did mention PLA), informative narrative details may have been overlooked. For example, if the documents that mentioned PLA (but were not primarily about PLA) had been coded, it might reveal details about how PLA is tied to other narratives. While the current study design considers how PLA documents present the policy narratives, it could be important to also consider which stakeholder groups mention PLA in narratives about other policy issues.

In the future, including documents that mentioned PLA, even if the document was not primarily focused on PLA, could be helpful in understanding PLA policy narratives. Expanding the scope of included documents could reveal details about narrative connections between policy issues.
Chapter Four: Findings

The most specific purpose of this study was to explore the PLA policy narratives, and the implications of those narratives, at the state level in Ohio, and the national level in higher education newspapers and prominent PLA advocacy groups. It was also a purpose of this study to examine how PLA narratives are structured and consider how the design of the narratives may influence democratic participation in higher education policy making. To fulfill the purposes, this narrative policy research study was designed around four research questions. This chapter details the findings in relation to the research questions.

The primary research question guiding this study was, RQ1: What narratives surround prior learning assessment policy for Ohio policy makers, higher education newspapers, and prominent PLA advocacy groups? To address this research question, data were collected from interviews with Ohio policy makers, and documents from Ohio Board of Regents (OBR), Inside Higher Ed, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), American Council on Education (ACE), and the Lumina Foundation. Table 1 shows that 325 documents were reviewed and 89 documents met the inclusion criteria of having been created between 2009 and 2015, being open-access, having a primary focus on PLA, and being of a length that would allow a narrative to exist. Figure 4 shows the number of PLA documents that were included in the study broken down by year. Figure 4 illustrates there has been an increase in the number of PLA documents that met the study criteria over the last four years.
Table 1: *Documents Reviewed and Included by Source*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Documents Reviewed</th>
<th>Documents Included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Board of Regents</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chronicle of Higher Education</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Higher Ed</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAEL</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumina Foundation</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4: Number of PLA Documents per Year*
PLA Narratives of Ohio Policy Makers

To identify the narratives surrounding PLA for Ohio policy makers, two state level policy makers were interviewed, and Ohio PLA policy documents were analyzed. First, the findings from the interviews are presented. Then, the findings from the Ohio PLA document analysis are detailed.

Results of Ohio Policy Maker Interviews

Interviews with two Ohio state level policy makers were conducted. Both policy makers answered each interview protocol question and were forthcoming. To protect the identity of the policy makers, hereafter they are referred to as “state policy maker 1” (SPM1) and “state policy maker 2” (SPM2). The interview with SPM1 lasted 44 minutes, and the interview with SPM2 lasted 15 minutes. Although the length of the interviews was varied, both participants answered all the interview questions. The time difference between the interviews appeared to be the result of the interview participants’ personal speaking styles. One participant provided direct responses, while the other participant provided more elaborate responses.

The interviews were transcribed and coded using two distinct methods. Coding the first time was conducted in a deductive fashion using the coding sheet discussed in Chapter 3 and included as Appendix E. Coding the second time was conducted in an inductive fashion in which significant themes were identified in the participants’ responses. Findings from deductive method utilizing the coding sheet are presented first.
Results from deductive coding of interviews.

After listening to the interviews and reading the interview transcripts multiple times, a coding sheet was completed for each of the interviews. The coding sheet yielded 30 data points for each interview. Analyzing the data points revealed both broad and specific details about the policy makers’ narratives. Starting with the broadest perspective, SPM1’s policy narrative for PLA cast PLA champions as heroes, faculty members as villains, and adult students and the state of Ohio as the victims. SPM2’s narrative presented PLA champions and students as heroes, bureaucracy and faculty members as villains, and taxpayers and students as victims.

SPM1’s narrative used the story type of *victory projected*, while SPM2’s narrative was a *truth claim* story type. Both policy makers identified the same two causal mechanisms for the policy issue. They shared that the policy issue is a result of intentionality and also inadvertence. Both policy makers’ narratives also contain “problem surfing” (Boscarino, 2009), which occurs when PLA or PLA solutions are tied to other problems. SPM1 described PLA or PLA solutions as tied to Ohio’s need for more people with “sophisticated post-secondary level skills,” the completion agenda, and changing student demographics. SPM2 tied PLA or PLA solutions to lower college costs, and a way to bring people who have not graduated back to college.

Both Ohio policy makers offered the same policy solution which was to increase the use of PLA. They also both cited research conducted by CAEL to support their argument. Both state-level policy makers used a *projected to win* narrative stance as they discussed PLA.
Using the coding sheet also yielded data points that provided detailed information about Ohio policy makers’ narratives. Both policy makers implied or suggested that there are costs associated with their policy solution to increase the use of PLA. SPM1 suggested that the faculty will bear a concentrated cost of the policy solution, and SPM2 suggested that cost will be diffused into challenges with Ohio’s articulation and transfer process. Both policy makers implied or suggested that the opposed policy solution (which is to not increasing the use of PLA), would place a concentrated cost on the students.

The policy makers identified the benefits of increasing PLA slightly differently. SPM1 suggested that there are multiple benefits for the students, that there is research suggesting that higher education institutions will benefit, and that some faculty will see the benefits. SPM2 suggested that students, Ohio campuses, and society on the whole will experience benefits from increasing PLA use.

**Results from inductive coding of interviews.**

Inductive coding of the Ohio state level policy maker interviews yielded additional findings pertaining to PLA narratives. Following an inductive coding process, the transcripts were read in their entirety multiple times. Then, the transcripts were coded for emerging themes. In addition to the narrative details gleaned from the previously discussed coding sheets, the inductive coding method illuminated details about the framing of PLA, the benefits of PLA for Ohio, faculty opposition, and research support for PLA.
Framing PLA.

When asked how they define prior learning assessment, both Ohio policy makers expressed similar definitions of PLA. However, the way they framed PLA was different. SPM2 stressed 4 times that the learning must be “college-level” and “credit worthy.” Alternatively, SPM1 stated that, “Learning happens in a whole bunch of different ways and that to presume that it entirely occurs in a traditional classroom or at a university is challenging.” SPM2’s frame of PLA places onus on students to demonstrate that they have gained “college-level” learning outside the traditional setting. But SPM1’s frame places PLA in an assumed position with onus on traditional academia to argue the quality differences between learning levels.

Benefits of PLA for Ohio.

The Ohio policy makers shared consistent descriptions of why PLA is important for Ohio. They both offered adult students as a priority for Ohio. When asked, “Why is prior learning assessment important for Ohio?”, SPM1 said, “Demographics.” Then SPM1 continued,

…pick your choice whether its policy makers, labor economists, or whomever the call is from. We need more people with more sophisticated post-secondary level skills. Meaning more people to earn credentials. In Ohio, they’re saying that we need to be at 60 percent by 2015, we’re about 38 percent now. It’s a simple math equation that we’ve got to figure out…and if you look at the demographics we’re having a drop of traditional students who are going to be coming in, so there’s no way that we will get to that 60 percent with just the traditional students.
In a very similar response, describing why PLA is important to Ohio, SPM2 provided,

In part, because although we do reasonably well in getting students directly from high school into college, we have a huge population of people who have either not gone to college or have not completed college and many of them probably have college-level learning that they’ve acquired in other ways. Being able to tell them that they can get credit for that may be more likely to bring them back in and that’s a desperately needed population that we need to get to.

For both of the Ohio policy makers interviewed, an element of the narrative is that PLA is intended to engage adult students in higher education to meet completion goals.

*Faculty opposition.*

A theme that emerged through both policy maker interviews was that faculty are seen as the primary opposition to increasing the use of PLA. When responding to the question, “Who or what presents the most opposition to prior learning assessment?” SPM2 said, “…I hate to say this but I think it’s probably faculty from both a concern about quality but also just a time standpoint. It’s [PLA] a heck of a lot more trouble than just having someone take a course…” While SPM2 identified faculty only when specifically asked to identify opposition, SPM1 described faculty opposition several times during the interview.

SPM1 stated that PLA, “…challenges some faculty because it challenges some of the traditional model that they’re the purveyors of information…”. Then, later in the interview SPM1 continued that,
A lot of the fears around PLA come from faculty anxieties of control of the curriculum, loss of quality or fear that it is somehow cheapening the quality and then I think the other part that…There is a fear that somehow you’re going to not, you’re going to miss out on the college experience. When I say the college experience it’s not the…It’s that learning often happens in a whole bunch of different ways in their group projects, and it’s the interactive human component. This is where I think the research is valid and useful about the number of credits that the average…Most people only get a few credits out of PLA. It’s kind of like a sampler more than anything else.

At another point in the interview, SPM1 further shared,

There’s often a mindset because it is not taught here, and because it is not taught by one of our faculty members, it is somehow ‘less than.’ Like you’re not getting what people need to know to be successful in our program. That’s across the board.

While both policy makers described faculty members as the primary opposition to increasing the use of PLA, SPM1 provided a more detailed description of that perception.

The state level policy makers differed on what they attributed the faculty resistance to. SPM1 attributed faculty resistance to misunderstandings about PLA, and referred to the need for “debunking the myths” about PLA with faculty. However, SPM2 attributed the faculty resistance to a lack of understanding not a misunderstanding. SPM2 stated,
I think the push back comes from everybody because they don’t really understand it. I think. And it takes time and energy to get that understanding. Then when you have understanding, I think then there’s still the problem of, ‘Well, they [the student] know this but they don’t know that.’ And ‘How do we give them [the student] credit for this part of this information?’ It is hard.

Viewing the faculty as misunderstanding PLA and viewing them as not having the information or answers about how to implement PLA may suggest that there are distinctly different frames being used by the two Ohio policy makers concerning the reasons for faculty resistance.

**Research support for PLA.**

For the Ohio policy makers interviewed, the research conducted by CAEL is foundational. Both policy makers indicated that they go to the CAEL research to support the argument for PLA. However, the interviews suggest there is at least some awareness of the limitations of the CAEL research. Although SPM1 used CAEL research several times during the interview to support the argument for increasing the use of PLA, later in the interview there was an acknowledgment of perhaps a misuse of the CAEL research. SPM1 offered that “…CAEL studies are good and they’re an initial piece except they’re predominantly with students at nontraditional institutions.” Then SPM1 continued,

We keep talking about students who take PLA are more likely to be enrolled longer, get more credit, more likely to complete. Go back 30 years to the U.S. Department of Ed’s answers in the toolbox study, which came out and said data showed that taking Algebra 2 in high school leads to greater post-secondary
success. …I think that where it’s analogous is those data turned out for Algebra 2, and I suspect it’s going to be the same for PLA, to be correlational not causal because the students who took Algebra 2 were the more prepared, more academic…. PLA is hard, so the students who are at this point in time now completing PLA are probably at some level of self-selection highly motivated students or more highly motivated students.

The interview results suggest there is a reliance on CAEL’s PLA research. This reliance may mean the Ohio policy makers’ narratives will show similarities with those of CAEL.

Results of Ohio PLA Document Analysis

The document collection methods detailed in Chapter Three yielded 18 Ohio state level PLA documents. Twelve of the 18 documents met the inclusion criteria for the study. Among the documents meeting the inclusion criteria, there were no PLA documents from 2009 or 2010. There was one document from 2011, three from 2012 and also from 2013, one from 2014 and four PLA policy documents from 2015. The 12 documents matching the inclusion criteria were analyzed using the coding sheet discussed in Chapter Three and included as Appendix E.

Summarizing the findings from the Ohio policy documents, the narrative most commonly constructed includes the PLA champion as hero, bureaucracy as the villain, and students as the victims. The story type is either truth claim or victory projected, or a combination of the two. The causal mechanism varied but were identified as intentionality, mechanical, or inadvertence. Problem surfing occurred in the majority of Ohio policy documents, and the PLA policy solutions were most often tied to college
completion and increasing the Ohio workforce. The CAEL (2010) study is the research used most often in Ohio PLA policy narratives. The Ohio PLA narrative is constructed with the students bearing the costs for not increasing the use of PLA, and the students as the beneficiaries of an increase in the use PLA. Most of the Ohio PLA narratives have a winning policy stance. A detailed accounting of the Ohio policy document analysis follows.

All the Ohio PLA policy documents analyzed had a pro-PLA narrative. Ten of the 12 documents (83%) identified or implied one hero in the narrative, but 2 documents identified or implied 2 heroes in the narrative. Among the 10 documents that constructed a narrative with one hero, 7 documents identified the PLA champion as hero, and 3 identified the military veteran champion as hero. Both of the documents that constructed a narrative with 2 heroes cast the PLA champion and the completion-agenda champion as the heroes. All 12 documents identified only one villain in the narrative construction. One document identified faculty skepticism as the villain, but the other 11 documents (92%) all identified bureaucracy as the villain. Nine of the documents identified only one victim, and 3 documents identified a total of 2 victims in the narrative. Among the documents with one victim, 9 identified students as the victim. All 3 of the documents containing 2 victims, cast students plus Ohio as the victims. Collectively, the analysis reveals that Ohio PLA policy documents most often have a narrative designed with the PLA champion as hero, bureaucracy as the villain, and the students as the victim.

The story types used in the documents varied. Four documents used a victory projected story type. Four documents used a truth claim story type. Only one used a
victory story type, and three documents used a combined truth claim and victory projected story type. Every Ohio policy document directly identified or implied a causal theory, however, like the story types, the causal theories varied. Two documents identified only one causal theory and 10 identified 2 or more causal theories. The 2 documents with one causal theory identified the causal theory of intentionality. Three documents identified mechanical and inadvertence as the causal theories. Three identified intentionality and mechanical as the causal theories. Four documents identified three causal theories within their narrative. The three causal theories identified in those were intentionality, mechanical, and inadvertence. Collectively, the document analysis reveals that the story types most often used in Ohio policy documents were victory projected, truth claim, or a combination of those two. However, the causal theories used in the Ohio policy documents present in more of a cluster than one specific narrative design. The cluster of causal theories that appeared in the documents identify intentionality, mechanical, inadvertence or a combination of those causes most often.

Of the analyzed documents, 8 Ohio policy documents (67%) engaged in problem surfing which ties PLA or PLA solutions to other problems. The narratives tied PLA solutions to:

- U.S. skilled worker shortage, completion agenda, Ohio’s economic competitive standing
- Shortage of skilled workers, completion agenda, Ohio’s economic standing, National economic standing
- Rising college costs, student debt, performance funding
• Completion goal
• College completion, unemployment
• Veterans as valuable to Ohio workforce
• Ohio skilled-worker deficit
• Need to increase the number of military service members and veterans living and working in Ohio

While the documents show slight variation in the problem surfing, the Ohio documents most often tied PLA solutions to the problems of college completion and increasing the Ohio workforce.

In the Ohio policy documents analyzed, seven cited research evidence in the narrative. Six of the documents used research to both support their argument and in a matter-of-fact presentation. One document used research to support their argument, refute an argument, and in a matter-of-fact presentation. When research evidence was used, the CAEL (2010) research was cited most often in Ohio policy documents. Five of the seven documents that used research cited the CAEL (2010) study. The research cited next often was that of Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010). The Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl research was used in 3 of the 7 documents. Mirroring the interview results, the document analysis shows Ohio policy documents are heavily reliant upon CAEL research in crafting a PLA narrative.

Analysis of the Ohio policy documents shows how the costs and benefits of increasing PLA are narratively presented. Only half of the policy documents imply or suggest that there are costs to their policy solution. The other half did not imply there
would be a cost to their policy solution. Of the six that identified a policy solution cost, five implied that the higher education institutions would bear the cost, and one implied that the faculty would bear the cost. All 12 documents identified a cost to the opposed policy solution (which in this case is not increasing the use of PLA). Every document identified that students would bear the cost of not increasing the use of PLA, but some documents identified specific student groups, and some documents added that Ohio would bear the cost of not increasing the use of PLA. Among the documents that specified the student groups who would bear the cost, 5 identified veteran and military students specifically. All 12 documents identified benefits to their policy solution of increasing the use of PLA. As was the case with costs, every Ohio PLA policy document identified students would benefit from their policy solution. Again, some of the documents referenced specific students (i.e. military and veteran students), and additionally added that institutions, and the state would benefit as well. However, the cornerstone of the cost and benefit narrative for Ohio PLA policy narratives is that the students are bearing the cost of not increasing the use of PLA, and the students will be the beneficiaries of increasing the use of PLA.

All of the Ohio PLA policy documents analyzed had a discernible policy stance. Nine of the documents had a winning stance and three had a projected to win stance. The winning stance is demonstrated in the following quotes from the analyzed documents:

- “In June of 2013, Governor John R. Kasich signed Executive Order 2013-05K to support Ohio’s veterans by ensuring they are receiving the appropriate
credit and credentialing for their military training and experience” (Ohio Board of Regents, nd.a, p. 3)

- “State institutions of higher education shall do all of the following by July 1, 2015 (R.C. 3333.164 C): 1. [E]nsure that appropriate equivalent credit is awarded for military training, experience, and coursework that meet the standards developed by the chancellor pursuant to this section” (Ohio Board of Regents, nd.b, p. 1).

The projected to win stance is demonstrated in the following quote from an Ohio PLA policy document:

- “Ohio's long track record of promoting strong articulation and transfer policies positions the state favorably to join this group of leading states, and to potentially emerge as a national leader in the PLA landscape” (Ohio Board of Regents, 2012c, p. 18).

**Summary of Findings Identifying PLA Narratives for Ohio Policy Makers**

Collecting both interview and document analysis data provided a triangulated view of the narratives surrounding PLA for Ohio policy makers. Findings from this study indicate that the Ohio PLA policy narrative casts the PLA champion as hero, and bureaucracy and faculty members as villains. The students, taxpayers, and state of Ohio are cast as the victims. The story type tends to be either victory projected or truth claim.

Several themes emerged from analysis of the Ohio state level interviews and documents. The first theme is that PLA is universally framed in both the Ohio policy maker interviews and the Ohio documents as a positive practice. There were no
documents or interviews with an anti-PLA frame. This finding suggests that opposing voices are not equally represented in the Ohio PLA policy narrative.

The second theme that emerged was that the PLA policy narrative identified victims of not increasing the use of PLA. Therefore, the Ohio PLA narrative suggests that the opposed PLA policy solution of not increasing the use of PLA, will be harmful to students, taxpayers, and the state of Ohio. This finding is significant because prior research suggests that when a victim is cast in a positive light, the policy outcome tends to favor that group (Schneider, Ingram, & Deleon, 2014).

The third theme that emerged from analyzing the Ohio PLA narratives is that there is a heavy reliance on the CAEL research to support the argument for increasing the use of PLA. As will be detailed later in this chapter, the CAEL research has been heavily funded by the Lumina Foundation. The Lumina Foundation, in its efforts to effect policy, financially supports research such as that conducted by CAEL which is supportive of the Lumina Foundation mission. And the Ohio PLA narrative is heavily reliant on that CAEL research. These findings support the concern that an insular circle of policy voices could be influencing the PLA narrative in the state of Ohio.

Narratives of Higher Education Newspapers

Following the methods described in Chapter Three, PLA documents created by higher education newspapers were collected. The documents were collected from The Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Ed. The Chronicle of Higher Education yielded 38 unique documents. Of the 38 documents reviewed, 15 met the inclusion criteria for this study. Inside Higher Ed yielded 90 unique documents. Of the 90
documents reviewed, 28 met the inclusion criteria for this study. Therefore, *Inside Higher Ed* ran more than twice as many articles on PLA during the identified timeframe than *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

**Findings from The Chronicle of Higher Education.**

Among the 15 articles from *The Chronicle* that met the study criteria, one was from 2009, 3 from 2010, one from 2011, and no PLA articles in 2012. Then, there were 7 PLA articles from 2013, 2 from 2014, and 1 in 2015. Among the 15 PLA articles from *The Chronicle* that were included in the study, one article had an anti-PLA stance, 9 had a pro-PLA stance, and 5 had a balanced stance.

As a summary of the data revealing the PLA narratives in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, analysis shows the most common PLA narrative cast the PLA champion as hero, bureaucracy as villain, students as victim and utilized a victory projected story type. The findings further reveal that PLA narratives in *The Chronicle* most often identified a mechanical causal mechanism and also engaged in problem surfing. The majority of the articles did not use research evidence to support the narrative, however, when the article did use research, the CAEL (2010) study was the only one cited. The narratives did not typically identify that there is a cost to increasing PLA, however, they did identify that there is a cost to the opposed solution (not increasing PLA) and that the students would bear that cost. The narratives also identified that the students would bear the benefits of the proposed policy solution. The most common policy stance used to construct the PLA narratives in *The Chronicle* was
projected to win. A detailed accounting of the PLA narratives in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* follows.

Twelve of *The Chronicle* articles identified or implied one hero in the narrative, and 3 articles identified or implied two heroes in the narrative. Among the articles identifying one hero, 9 cast the PLA champion as hero, 2 cast higher education quality champion as hero, and one cast bureaucracy concern as hero. Among the articles identifying two heroes, one identified the PLA champion and the student as heroes, one identified bureaucracy concern and completion-agenda champion as heroes, and one identified the PLA champion and higher education quality champion as hero.

Twelve of the articles from *The Chronicle* identified or implied one villain, and three articles identified or implied two villains. Among the articles identifying one villain, 11 identified bureaucracy as villain, and one identified completion-agenda champion as villain. Ten articles identified or implied one victim, and 5 articles identified two victims. Among the articles identifying one victim, nine identified students as the victims and one article identified higher education quality as victim. Among the articles identifying two victims, two identified students and taxpayers as victims. The other 3 articles that identified two victims each cast the student as one of the victims, and the second victim was identified as competency programs, slow economy, and employers.

One article included from *The Chronicle* did not have an identifiable story type; however, 14 articles’ story types were identifiable. Among the articles with discernible story types, 10 used a victory projected story type. There was one article with a victory story type, one with a truth claim story type, one with a helplessness and control story
type, and one article that had a story type that combined both stymied progress and victory projected. These findings reveal that *The Chronicle* articles most commonly had a victory projected story type.

All *The Chronicle* articles identified or implied a causal mechanism. With 6 articles identifying it, the most commonly identified single causal mechanism was mechanical. Two articles identified the single causal mechanism as intentionality, and one identified inadvertence. Among the 5 articles that identified two causal mechanisms, 3 articles identified both intentionality and mechanical causal mechanisms, and two articles identified both mechanical and inadvertence. These findings reveal that the largest number of articles use a mechanical causal theory in the PLA narrative.

Among the articles included in the study from *The Chronicle*, 13 contained problem surfing and 2 did not. In the 13 *Chronicle* articles that engaged in problem surfing, which ties PLA or PLA solutions to other problems, the narratives tied PLA solutions to problems such as the need to:

- Save time and money for students
- Increase low graduation rates
- Shortened time to degree completion
- Enroll and graduate more students
- Help people re-gain employment
- Improve completion rates
- Be more responsive to the needs of adult learners
- Deal with pressing questions about competencies and cost
• Increase the number of college graduates as fast as possible
• Increase the number of adults with degrees or certificates
• Control college costs
• Increase learning productivity, and deepen college curricula

Among the articles from *The Chronicle* that were included in this study, 14 of the 15 provided a policy solution. Although the policy solutions are worded somewhat differently, they can all be summarized as being an increased use of PLA.

Ten of the articles did not cite science or evidence in the narrative and five did. Four of the five articles that cited research used the CAEL (2010) study. The one other article that used research did not cite a specific source for the information. Therefore, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* was exclusively reliant upon one study for evidence regarding PLA. Analysis showed 4 of the 5 articles that used science or evidence in the narrative used the research to support their argument. The one other article citing evidence in the narrative used the research to refute an argument.

Analysis of *The Chronicle* articles revealed how the costs and benefits of increasing PLA are narratively presented. Nine articles did not imply or suggest that there would be a cost associated with increasing PLA. Six articles did suggest there would be a cost associated with increasing PLA. Each of the six articles offered a different narrative for who bears the cost of increasing the use of PLA but one article provided two groups that would bear the cost. The articles identified the following groups as those who would bear the cost of their policy solution:

• Students
• Federal student aid
• The quality of higher education (anti-PLA) and today’s students (pro-PLA)
• Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
• Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Kresge & Joyce Foundation
• Walmart employee students

All 15 articles identified that there was a cost to the opposed policy solution (which in this case is not increasing the use of PLA). Fourteen of the articles identified students as those that would bear the cost for the opposed policy solution, but 7 articles provided at least one additional group that would bear the cost. Each of The Chronicle articles implied or suggested that there are benefits to their policy solution and that students would bear those benefits.

Among the articles analyzed from The Chronicle, all but one contained a recognizable policy stance. Thirteen articles had a projected to win policy stance, and one article had a winning the battle, losing the war stance.

Findings from Inside Higher Ed.

Among the 28 articles from Inside Higher Ed that met the study criteria, zero were from 2009, one from 2010, and zero from 2011. Then, there were 12 PLA articles from 2012, 9 from 2013, 4 from 2014, and 2 in 2015. Among the 28 articles from Inside Higher Ed that were included in this study, 24 were pro-PLA, 4 were balanced in their stance, and there were no articles that were anti-PLA.

As a summary of the data revealing the PLA narratives in Inside Higher Ed, analysis shows the most common PLA narrative cast the PLA champion as hero,
bureaucracy as villain, students as victim and utilized a victory projected story type. The findings further reveal that PLA narratives in Inside Higher Ed most often identified a mechanical causal mechanism and also engaged in problem surfing. The majority (86% n=24) of the articles did not use research evidence to support the narrative. The narratives did typically identify that there is a cost to increasing PLA, and that the student would bear the cost. They also typically identified that there is a cost to the opposed solution (not increasing PLA) and that the students would bear that cost. The narratives also identified that the students would bear the benefits of the proposed policy solution. The most common policy stance used to construct the PLA narratives in Inside Higher Ed was projected to win. A detailed accounting of the PLA narratives in Inside Higher Ed follows.

Of the Inside Higher Ed articles, 25 identified or implied one hero and 3 articles identified or implied two heroes. Among the articles identifying one hero, 19 cast the PLA champion as hero, 5 cast bureaucracy concern as hero, and one cast higher education quality champion as hero. Among the articles identifying two heroes, 2 articles identified the PLA champion and higher education quality champion as heroes, and one article identified the PLA champion and the student as heroes.

Twenty-four of the Inside Higher Ed articles identified one villain in the PLA narrative, two articles identified 2 villains, and two articles did not identify or imply a villain. Of the articles identifying one villain, 20 identified bureaucracy as villan. Two articles cast the completion-agenda as villain, one article cast the legislature as villain and one cast the faculty member as villain.
Among the *Inside Higher Ed* articles, 25 identified one victim in the PLA narrative, two articles did not identify or imply a victim, and one article identified 2 victims in the narrative. Of the articles with one victim, 19 cast the students as victim. Four articles cast either non-institutional providers of PLA or innovative PLA institutions as the victim. Two articles cast higher education quality as victim. The article that identified two victims cast the students and innovative PLA institutions as victims.

All the *Inside Higher Ed* articles contained a discernible story type. In 17 articles the story type was victory projected. Four articles had a victory story type, 3 articles had a truth claim story type, 3 articles had a stymied progress story type and one article had a story of decline story type. Therefore, the most common story type used in *Inside Higher Ed* articles was victory projected.

All the *Inside Higher Ed* articles had a direct or implied causal theory. Fifteen articles identified the causal mechanism as mechanical. Five articles identified the causal mechanism as intentional, and 8 articles identified both intentionality and mechanical causal mechanisms in the PLA narrative.

Problem surfing, or tying PLA or PLA solutions to other problems, occurred in 21 of the *Inside Higher Ed* articles. Seven articles did not contain problem surfing. Among the articles that did engage in problem surfing, the narratives tied PLA solutions to problems such as the need to:

- Help displaced workers and adult students
- Help students earn degrees quicker and more cheaply
- Increase college completion and workforce development
- Satisfy the expanding adult student market
- Improve degree completion
- Improve student persistence and academic success
- Achieve the completion agenda
- Lead the world
- Provide "better, faster, and more flexible" pathways to academic credentials and jobs
- End student veterans wasting time and money re-learning what they already know
- Address student debt

Of the Inside Higher Ed articles included in this study, 24 did not cite science or evidence in the PLA narrative. Of the 4 articles that did use research, 2 articles cited CAEL research, one cited the Babson Survey Research Group, and one article did not identify the source of the evidence they cited. Among the articles that did cite research, three used the research to support their argument, and one used it in a matter-of-fact manner. This analysis reveals the PLA narratives presented in the Inside Higher Ed articles are rarely constructed with research evidence.

Analysis of the Inside Higher Ed articles reveal how the costs and benefits of increasing PLA are narratively presented. In 19 of the articles, the narrative implies or suggests that there are costs to their policy solution (which is to increase the use of PLA). Nine of the articles do not imply there is a cost to their policy solution. Among the articles that identify a cost to increasing the use of PLA, the student was most commonly
identified as bearing the cost. In addition to the student, the articles also identified the following as those who would bear the cost of their policy solution:

- Institutions
- Institutional offerings
- Higher education quality
- Federal aid programs
- Accreditors
- Employers
- Traditional Colleges
- Faculty

The PLA narratives most often implied or suggested that there were costs to the opposed policy solution (which is not to increase the use of PLA). Twenty-three articles identified a cost to the opposed policy solution, and 5 did not. Among the articles identifying a cost to the opposed policy solution, students were most often identified as those who would bear the cost. Every Inside Higher Ed article included in the study identified benefits to their policy solution of increasing the use of PLA. The most common narrative identifies the student as bearing the benefits of increasing the use of PLA.

Among the Inside Higher Ed articles, 20 used a policy stance of projected to win. Seven articles used a winning stance, and one used a winning the battle, losing the war policy stance.
Summary of Findings Identifying PLA Narratives in Higher Education Newspapers

Analyzing documents from higher education newspapers provided a national level perspective on PLA policy narratives. Analyzing documents from higher education newspapers also allowed a triangulated view of PLA narratives. The findings from this study indicate the PLA narratives in higher education newspapers cast the PLA champion as hero, bureaucracy as villain, and students as victim. The story type used most often in the higher education newspapers was victory projected.

Several significant findings emerged from analyzing the higher education newspaper PLA narratives. The first significant finding is that out of all the articles over the years included in the study, there was only one article that could be described as anti-PLA. The overwhelming majority (77% \( n=33 \)) of higher education newspaper narratives were pro-PLA and the remaining 21 percent of articles (\( n=9 \)) were balanced. This finding is significant because previous narrative policy researchers have demonstrated the media’s ability to influence policy opinion (Shanahan, McBeth, & Hathaway, 2011). While faculty members have expressed concerns over PLA (e.g., Public Agenda, 2013), those concerns are dismissed within the pro-PLA narrative. Therefore, while there is evidence of an anti-PLA policy stance, the anti-PLA statements are downplayed within the frame of the dominant pro-PLA narrative. Finding that opposing voices are not commensurately represented within higher education newspapers suggests the media’s dominant pro-PLA narrative advantages the pro-PLA policy stance.

The second significant finding from analysis of the PLA narratives in higher education newspapers is that 79 percent of the time (\( n=34 \)) the narrative does not cite any
evidence. In the small percentage of documents that cite evidence, there is an almost exclusive reliance on the CAEL (2010) research. And when the CAEL (2010) research is used, the limitations of the research are never mentioned in the PLA narrative. These findings concerning the very limited use of evidence in creating PLA narratives in higher education newspapers may support the Narrative Policy Framework assumption that narratives are central in the policy process. Based on the higher education newspapers, there is very limited use of research evidence to support the policy solution of increasing the use of PLA, however, there is an increase in PLA policy. Therefore, as NPF would predict, narratives may be playing a central role in the policy process.

Narratives of Prominent PLA Advocacy Groups

Following the methods detailed in Chapter Three, PLA documents created by prominent PLA advocacy groups were collected. Documents from CAEL, ACE, and Lumina Foundation were collected. The collection process yielded 35 documents from CAEL. Of those 35 documents, 10 fit the criteria for inclusion in this study. The collection process yielded 113 documents from ACE. Of the 113 ACE documents, 22 fit the inclusion criteria. The collection process yielded 31 documents from the Lumina Foundation. However, only 2 Lumina Foundation documents fit the criteria for inclusion in this study.

Findings from CAEL.

Among the 10 documents from CAEL that met the inclusion criteria for this study, none were from 2009, 2014, or 2015. Three were from 2010, 2 from 2011, and 3 from 2012. All 10 documents had a pro-PLA stance.
To summarize the findings from the CAEL documents, the most common narrative cast the PLA champion as the hero, there was no villain, and the students were victims. The most common story type was truth claim. Mechanical was the most common causal mechanism. The documents most often engaged in problem surfing and every document included science or evidence to support the narrative. The CAEL documents did not usually identify a cost associated with increasing the use of PLA, but identified a cost associated with the opposed policy solution. The documents identified that the students would bear the cost of the opposed policy solution (which is not increasing the use of PLA). In the CAEL documents, various groups bear the benefits of increasing the use of PLA. The most common policy stance in the CAEL documents was projected to win. A detailed accounting of the PLA narratives from CAEL follows.

All the CAEL documents identified one hero in the PLA narrative. In all the documents, the PLA champion was identified as the hero. Seven of the documents do not identify a villain, and three documents do identify a villain. All three of the documents identifying a villain cast bureaucracy in that role. Among the CAEL documents, 6 identified one victim in the PLA narrative, 2 documents identified 2 victims, and 2 documents identified 3 victims. Of the documents that identified one victim, they all cast the student as victim. Of the 2 documents that identified 2 victims, one document cast the student and the U.S. as global-competitor as victims, and the other cast the student and employers as victims. Of the two documents that identified 3 victims, one document cast the taxpayers, students, and the U.S. as global-competitor as the victims, and the other document cast the taxpayers, students, and employers as the victims.
Each of the CAEL documents included in this study had a recognizable story type. Eight of the documents had a truth claim story type. One document had a victory story type, and one document had a story type combining stymied progress and truth claim. All of the CAEL documents also identified a causal mechanism. The causal mechanisms identified in the CAEL narratives varied; however, the most common causal mechanism identified was mechanical. Four documents identified mechanical and inadvertence as the causal mechanisms. Two documents identified intentionality and mechanical, and two documents identified intentionality, mechanical, and inadvertence as the causal mechanisms. One document identified intentionality and one document identified mechanical as the causal mechanisms.

Among the CAEL documents, nine engaged in problem surfing and one document did not. When the documents tied PLA or PLA solutions to other problems, the documents problem surfed to problems such as the need to:

- Address the growing needs of the workforce
- Help underserved or disadvantaged adult populations
- Improve degree completion, student retention, and academic success
- Maintain the nation’s competitive edge and economic success
- Make college more affordable, increase attainment rates, and support our nation’s economic competitiveness
- Satisfy employers’ needs for a more highly skilled workforce
- Save time and money, and increase graduation rates
- Help older Americans who are working longer
• Improve graduation rates and reduce time and cost of college

All the CAEL documents cited science or evidence in the narrative. Eight of the documents referenced the CAEL (2010) study. The other two documents referenced both the CAEL (2010) study and the Lumina/Gallup Public Opinion Study. In one CAEL document the research was used to support their argument. In nine of the documents, the research was used to both support their argument and in a matter-of-fact fashion.

In eight of the CAEL documents, the narrative did not imply or suggest that there are costs to their policy solution of increasing the use of PLA. In two documents there was a cost identified. Among the two documents identifying a cost to the policy solution, one document identified that the federal government would bear the cost and the other document identified the federal and state governments would bear the cost of increasing the use of PLA. Every CAEL document did identify a cost to the opposed policy solution (which is to not increase the use of PLA). Students were most often identified as the group that would bear the costs of not increasing the use of PLA. All the CAEL documents identified a benefit to their policy solution and the bearers of the benefits were identified as:

• States
• Institutions
• Students
• Employers
• Underserved and disadvantaged adult students
• Nation
• Federal government
• Taxpayers

Every CAEL document had an identifiable policy stance. In eight of the documents, the CAEL policy stance was projected to win, and in two of the documents it was a winning stance.

**Findings from ACE.**

Among the 22 ACE documents that fit the inclusion criteria for this study, none were from 2009 or 2011. One document was from 2010, two from 2012, seven from 2013, four from 2014, and eight from 2015. Every ACE document had a pro-PLA stance.

To summarize the findings from the ACE documents, the most common narrative cast the PLA champion as hero, bureaucracy as villain, and students as victim. The most common story type used in the ACE documents was victory projected. The most common causal mechanism identified was mechanical. Most ACE documents engaged in problem surfing, but did not use science or evidence in the PLA narrative. Most documents did not identify a cost to their policy solution, however, most ACE documents identified a cost to the opposed policy solution. The students were identified as those who would bear the cost of not increasing the use of PLA. The ACE documents also identified the students would bear the benefits of increasing the use of PLA. The most common policy stance used in the ACE documents was projected to win. A detailed accounting of the PLA narratives from ACE follows.

Of the ACE documents in the study, 20 identified one hero and two identified two heroes. Among the documents identifying one hero, 18 identified the PLA champion as
the hero and two identified bureaucracy concern as hero. The two documents that identified two heroes both cast the PLA champion and the student as heroes. Twenty-one of the ACE documents identified one villain, and one document identified two villains. Among the documents identifying one villain, 20 cast bureaucracy as villain and one document cast unscrupulous companies as villain. The one document that identified two villains cast bureaucracy and faculty members as the villains. Nineteen ACE documents identified one victim and three documents identified two victims. All of the 19 documents that identified one victim cast the students as victims. Both the documents identifying two victims cast the students and the U.S. as a global-competitor as the victims.

All the ACE documents had a recognizable story type. Sixteen documents had a victory projected story type. Four documents had a truth claim story type. One document had a victory story type and one had a combined truth claim and victory projected story type.

Among the ACE documents included in this study, all identified a causal mechanism. Eleven documents identified a mechanical causal mechanism. Six documents identified both mechanical and inadvertence as causal mechanisms. Three documents identified both intentionality and mechanical causes. One document identified intentionality as the causal mechanism, while one document identified intentionality, mechanical, and inadvertence as the causal mechanisms.
Problem surfing occurred in sixteen of the ACE documents, but did not occur in six. When the documents tied PLA or PLA solutions to other problems, the documents problem surfed to problems such as the need to:

- Achieve the completion agenda
- Serve the over age 50 population increasingly remaining in the workforce longer
- Address a shortage of Americans with postsecondary credentials
- Capture the nation’s large investment in education and training outside the classroom
- Ensure economic competitiveness
- Respond to changes in student patterns
- Protect the nation’s global competitiveness
- Respond to national call to increase STEM education
- Improve unemployment rates of veterans
- Raise degree completions, deepen college curricula, and increase learning productivity
- Achieve national goal to be world’s best educated nation
- Serve adults who have some college credit but no degree
- Engage adult learners

Among the ACE documents, 16 did not cite research or evidence in the narrative, but six documents did cite research. The CAEL (2010) and Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010) research was used in one article. And CAEL (2010), Georgetown, Rye (2013),
and a joint study by Blackboard, Center for Educational Attainment, and Center for Policy Research and Strategy (2015) each appeared in one ACE document. All six documents that cited evidence used it to support their argument and in a matter-of-fact fashion.

Analysis of the ACE documents reveal how the costs and benefits of PLA policy are addressed in the narratives. Twelve documents did not imply or suggest that there are costs to their policy solution of increasing the use of PLA, and 10 documents did identify costs. Among the documents that implied or suggested costs, the following were identified as bearing the costs of increasing the use of PLA:

- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Students
- Institutions
- Faculty
- Higher education systems
- Foundations supplying grants

Among the ACE documents, 21 identified costs to the opposed policy solution (which is to not increase the use of PLA), and one document did not identify costs. Every document that identified costs to the opposed policy solution identified that the students bear the costs of not increasing the use of PLA. All ACE documents identified benefits of their policy solution. The ACE documents identified that the students would bear the benefits of increasing the use of PLA.
All the ACE documents included in this study had discernible policy stances. Eighteen documents had a projected to win policy stance. Four documents utilized a winning stance.

**Findings from Lumina Foundation.**

Of the 31 documents from the Lumina Foundation that were reviewed, only two fit the inclusion criteria for this study. Therefore, the Lumina documents had the lowest inclusion percentage of all the document sources. While there were various reasons the Lumina documents did not meet the study criteria, most often the Lumina documents did not primarily discuss PLA. For example, in a Lumina document that was 27 paragraphs in length, there was only one sentence pertaining to PLA. The sentence read, “We are seeing rapid growth in competency-based programs and new efforts to assess and award credit for prior learning — the knowledge and skills that students gain outside the classroom” (Merisotis, 2015, para. 19). However, the remainder of the document was not specific to PLA. Therefore, the document was excluded from the study. In only two documents was the focus enough on PLA that the document could be included in the study.

Another overarching finding from researching the Lumina PLA documents is that Lumina’s website is populated with a large amount of material authored from their grant awardees. For example, several of the CAEL-authored policy documents that were analyzed from the CAEL website also appeared on the Lumina Foundation website. Given the finding that Lumina’s website primarily contains the narratives of their grant recipients, I researched who received Lumina grants associated with PLA and what dollar
amounts were associated with the grant awards. Searching the Lumina grant database with the search phrase “prior learning assessment” revealed that almost four million dollars has been awarded to CAEL associated with PLA. Table 2 shows the date range and amounts of the Lumina grants awarded to CAEL.

Table 2: *Dates and Amounts of Lumina Grants to CAEL*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
<th>Duration (in months)</th>
<th>Funding Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5/13/2015</td>
<td>7/20/2015</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/16/2013</td>
<td>8/15/2015</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>$1,097,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/01/2012</td>
<td>9/30/2014</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/01/2010</td>
<td>6/30/2012</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/01/2009</td>
<td>5/31/2010</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>$175,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/01/2008</td>
<td>5/01/2010</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>$399,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Lumina documents were coded using the same coding sheet as the other source documents. Of the two Lumina documents included in this study, one was from 2013 and the other was from 2015. Both documents had a pro-PLA stance.

To summarize the Lumina documents, the narrative hero was the PLA champion, bureaucracy and faculty members were the villains, students were the victims, and the story type was truth claim. The Lumina documents identified intentionality and mechanical causal mechanisms. They engaged in problem surfing. The Lumina
documents used research in the PLA narrative. The students were identified as bearing the benefits of increasing the use of PLA.

One of the Lumina documents identified one hero, and the other document identified three heroes. In the article identifying one hero, the document identified the PLA champion as hero. The article with three heroes identified bureaucracy concern, PLA champion, and the completion-agenda champion as the heroes. Both Lumina documents identified one villain. One document identified the faculty member as villain and the other document identified bureaucracy as villain. One Lumina document identified one victim and one identified three victims. The document identifying one victim cast the student as victim. The other document identified students, the U.S. as global-competitor, and employers as victims.

Both Lumina documents included in this study had discernible story types. One document used a truth claim story type. The other document used a story type combining truth claim and victory projected.

Both Lumina documents had a direct or implied causal theory. One document identified intentionality and mechanical causal mechanisms. The other document identified intentionality, mechanical, and inadvertence as causal mechanisms.

Both Lumina documents engaged in problem surfing. When the documents tied PLA or PLA solutions to other problems, the documents problem surfed to problems such as the need to:

- Address the shift in student demographics, the shift to a knowledge-based economy, and the nation’s attainment agenda
• Have far more of our citizens properly educated so the nation can thrive in the
global economy and continue to progress as a society

Both the Lumina documents cited science or evidence in the PLA narrative. One
document referenced The CAEL (2010) research and research conducted by Hayward
and Williams, however, no research date appeared in the text and the citation did not
appear in the document’s references. The other Lumina document referenced the research
conducted jointly between Lumina and Gallup. Both documents used the research to
support their argument and also in a matter-of-fact fashion.

The Lumina documents identified or implied costs to their policy solution of
increasing the use of PLA. The documents identified the costs of increasing the use of
PLA would be bore by: institutions, faculty, state and federal governments, grant funders,
higher education administrators, and higher education. Both Lumina documents
identified costs to the opposed policy solution. One document identified that students
would bear the costs for not increasing the use of PLA, and one document identified that
students and the nation would bear the costs. The Lumina documents identified that the
students, employers, and the nation would bear the benefits of their policy solution.

Both Lumina documents had a discernible policy stance. They both used a
projected to win policy stance.

Summary of Findings: PLA Narratives in Prominent PLA Advocacy Groups

Analyzing documents from three prominent PLA advocacy groups provided a
national level view of PLA policy narratives. Analyzing the PLA advocacy groups
narratives also allowed a triangulated view of PLA policy narratives.
The findings from this study indicate that the PLA narratives created by advocacy groups cast the PLA champion as hero. CAEL did not typically identify a villain, but ACE identified bureaucracy as villain, and Lumina identified bureaucracy and faculty members as villains. All three advocacy groups cast students as victim in the PLA narrative. CAEL and Lumina used a truth claim story type, and ACE used a victory projected story type.

While it is certainly not surprising that all the advocacy group documents have a pro-PLA stance, it was surprising to find that CAEL did not typically identify a villain and that ACE identified bureaucracy as villain. This finding may demonstrate that the advocacy groups are utilizing a well conceived frame of PLA policy. Particularly ACE, as a member organization, may be a more effective advocacy group when they do not identify the largest segment of their membership as the villain.

Another significant finding from analysis of PLA advocacy group documents is that all three identified the student as the victim in the PLA policy narrative. This finding demonstrates the issue raised in Chapter Two; that the narrative is premised on an unsupported syllogism. However, whether the syllogism is supported or not, the use of the student as victim allows the PLA advocacy groups to discuss PLA policy with a powerful benevolence frame. This finding is helpful in considering not only the PLA policy issue, but may also be helpful when considering other higher education policy issues.
Structure of PLA Narratives

The second research question addressed in this study was RQ2: How are the narratives surrounding PLA policy structured? To address this research question, the data from the interviews with Ohio policy makers, and the documents from OBR, *The Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, CAEL, ACE, and the Lumina Foundation* will be discussed collectively.

**Narrative hero.**

Considering all the PLA policy narratives in this study, the hero was most frequently identified as the PLA champion. Figure 5 shows the number of narratives that identified each of the heroes. The finding that the PLA champion is most frequently cast as the hero is helpful in understanding the structure of PLA narratives. In previous NPF research, Jones (2010, 2013) found the hero character critical with regard to narrative persuasion. In an experimental study, Jones found that as positive affect for the hero increased so too did the participant’s willingness to accept the assumptions that formed the narrative, and the hero’s proposed policy solution. Therefore, the PLA policy narratives may be persuasive because the hero is able to create positive affect.
Findings from this study suggest that PLA policy narratives have an external hero; i.e., the hero in this narrative is not located within traditional higher education institutions. This finding may suggest that the PLA narrative revealed in this study is particularly well-suited for building state and federal legislative support because the legislative individuals are external to traditional higher education institutions as well. With both groups located external to traditional higher education institutions, that may suggest congruence between the hero and the state and federal level policy makers. Given this congruence and the larger negative narrative context surrounding higher education that was discussed in Chapter Two, a hero that is situated external to higher education may contribute to a successful policy narrative.

The following excerpts from the analyzed documents demonstrates how the PLA champion is cast in the hero role and is situated external to higher education:
• “Educating adults through prior-learning assessment will further the Lumina Foundation's goal of lifting the percentage of Americans with college credentials to 60 percent by 2025, the foundation said" (Ellis, 2013, para. 12).

• “These innovations, which Soares calls a ‘new ecosystem for learning validation outside of the academy,’ include corporate training universities, prior learning assessment and competency-based forms of education” (Fain, 2013c, para. 10).

Narrative villain.

The findings from this study most frequently identify bureaucracy as the villain in the PLA policy narratives. As Figure 6 shows, the narrative villain did not show as much variation as did the construct of the narrative PLA hero. The findings show a very simple construction of the villain. There were very few instances (n=5) when the narrative used more than one villain.
Figure 6: Narrative Villain Structure by Number of Narratives

Finding the simple structure of the villain in PLA narratives may be helpful in explaining the growing PLA policy interest. As Stone (2002, 2012) emphasizes, there is tremendous policy power gained when the policy coalition creates the frame of the policy issue. From a framing standpoint, if a policy coalition could successfully frame the villain as bureaucracy, which the findings in this study suggest the pro-PLA coalition has accomplished, then there are few groups in any way associated with higher education that would argue bureaucracy is good. Therefore, bureaucracy-as-the-villain frame appears to be very effective for the pro-PLA policy coalition.

The following excerpt taken from one of the analyzed documents demonstrates how bureaucracy is cast in the villain role: “But if some colleges follow through, the council’s recommendations could go a long way toward straightening the crooked path from free college courses to valuable college credits” (Kolowich, 2013, para. 6).
Narrative victim.

The findings of this study suggest that the victim is most frequently identified as the student in PLA narratives. As Figure 7 shows, the students are the victim in the narrative 71% \((n=63)\) of the time. The percentage would be even higher if the instances of the narrative identifying the students plus additional victims were included in the count.

*Figure 7: Narrative Victim Structure by Number of Narratives*
If the victim group, which can also be referred to as the target group, is socially constructed in a positive way, the policy outcome tends to favor that group (Schneider, Ingram, & Deleon, 2014). The PLA narratives in this study reveal that the victim is socially constructed in a positive fashion. This finding suggests that the positive construction of the students as victims may increase the power of the group in regard to policy.

The following excerpt from one of the analyzed documents provides an example of how the student position is cast in the victim role:

Prior learning assessment (PLA) is a way for you to earn college credit for things you already know. It saves you from having to take courses in subjects that you already understand. This means that you can progress more quickly towards getting your degree and you do not have to pay full tuition for these courses. (Ohio Board of Regents, n.d.c, para. 1)

Three additional excerpts from analyzed documents show how the victim is positively constructed in the PLA narratives:

- “Two things need to happen to put PLA within reach of adult learners: the availability of an on-line, large scale PLA infrastructure, and supportive federal and state PLA policy.” (CAEL, 2013, p. 9)
- “In June of 2013, Governor John R. Kasich signed Executive Order 2013-05K to support Ohio’s veterans by ensuring they are receiving the appropriate credit and credentialing for their military training and experience.” (Ohio Board of Regents, n.d.a, para. 3)
• “Thousands of veterans of the U.S. military receive credit recommendations for the training and experience they acquire in the service. But colleges often do not accept those credit recommendations, sometimes only granting three to six credits for physical education courses for a transcript of 20 or more credits, according to veterans and college officials” (Fain, 2013a, para. 1).

The positive construction of students as victims is an important finding to help explain PLA policy momentum. The narratives revealed a positive construction of both adult students and military and veteran students. The adult students were praised for being “hard-working” and balancing the needs of their family while pursuing their education. The military and veteran students were praised for their knowledge and abilities. The following excerpt is an example of how military and veteran students were described in an Ohio PLA policy document:

Whereas, current and former military members have received extensive education and skills training in a broad range of areas that directly correlate to private sector occupations and as a result of their military experience have gained leadership and management perspectives that are invaluable to today's employers. (Ohio Board of Regents, 2013, para. 5)

Findings that demonstrate the positive construction of students as victims, particularly the military and veteran students, could be an important consideration for PLA policy in Ohio. According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (2014), Ohio is 15\textsuperscript{th} in the nation for receiving veterans’ educational benefits. Nationally, the estimated service member and veteran education benefits expenditures in 2014 were
$12,200,000,000 (New America, 2015). Therefore, states have a financial incentive to attract and maintain enrollment of military and veteran students. Casting the students in a positively constructed victim role could help develop policies that benefit the platform.

**Narrative story type.**

Analysis of all the data in this study reveal that the story type is victory projected in the majority (53% $n=48$) of the PLA narratives. Truth claim is the next most frequently used story type in the narratives analyzed (24% $n=22$). These findings may be unique to this study and require more description.

The coding sheet used to analyze the PLA documents identified eight story types. The story types are some that are commonly accepted in the literature and history of narrative policy analysis (see Stone, 2012). However, in the current study, the categories did not always capture the story type that the narratives portrayed. Instead of the narratives presenting a victory story type, which is the category on the coding sheet that is most similar, most of the narratives could more accurately be categorized as having a victory projected story type. There were documents (9% $n=8$) that did contain a victory story type, however the majority were more accurately considered victory projected.

The following excerpts were chosen from the PLA documents analyzed to illustrate the differences between story types. The following excerpt suggests a victory story type, “Obviously it was very appealing because it was free,” Stenner said, adding that “I spent two weeks studying, as opposed to 15 weeks in a course” (Fain [Inside Higher Ed], 2013b, para. 9). The following excerpt suggests a truth claim story type: “College-level learning is the same, whether acquired in the traditional college classroom
or through non-collegiate sources. This equivalency is validated by academically sound and rigorous prior learning assessment methods” (Ohio Board of Regents, 2012b, p. 2).

The following excerpt suggests a victory projected story type:

Ohio aspires to have a simple, uniform and effective process in place to award college credit for military training, experience and coursework. That goal, however, is hampered by the fragmented, often bottom-up approach currently in place in the state. More unified and engaged state-level leadership is needed to bring structure, consistency, and the necessary resources to bear on this issue. (Ohio Board of Regents, 2013, p. 16)

The finding that the majority of PLA narratives are victory projected makes it challenging to incorporate these findings into the existing literature. Existing literature (Shanahan, McBeth, & Hathaway, 2011) discusses the victory story type and may or may not provide insight into a victory projected story type on the policy process.

**Causal mechanism.**

The interviews and documents analyzed in this study reveal that causal mechanisms are presented in complex and varied ways in the PLA narratives. There were almost exactly the same number of narratives that presented a single causal mechanism (\(n=45\)) as those that presented multiple causal mechanisms (\(n=46\)). Figure 8 shows the distribution of narratives for each identified causal mechanism.
Overwhelmingly, among the narratives that identified only one causal mechanism, the cause of the policy problem was said to be mechanical (78% \( n=35 \)). Even among the narratives that posited multiple causes, mechanical was identified as a cause in 96% \( (n=44) \) of the narratives. Therefore, while the results of this study do not clearly indicate whether the narratives are constructed with single or multiple causal mechanisms, the results do suggest that regardless of the single or multiple cause construction, the cause is nearly always identified as mechanical in the PLA narratives.

**Problem surfing.**

Most of the narratives analyzed did engage in problem surfing (78% \( n=71 \)). The coding sheet used to analyze the interviews and documents in this study yielded open response data on problem surfing. The open response data was collected and then the 71
cases were coded for themes. Six themes emerged from the analysis of the problem surfing. When a narrative tied PLA or PLA solutions to other problems, the problems they tied to (in descending order) were the needs to:

- Increase completion/graduation rates (Completion Agenda)
- Save time and money spent on college degree
- Increase the number of adults with degrees
- Improve workforce development
- Return the U.S. to a position of leading the world
- Improve employment and reduce time and cost for veterans

These findings reveal what the narratives suggest PLA will solve. These findings may help explain why PLA policy is expanding. Finding that the narratives often link PLA to the completion agenda does lend support to the idea that the completion agendas may have effect on policies that can successfully link their solution to the agenda.

These findings also highlight the gap in PLA effectiveness data. As was discussed in Chapter Two, at present, the PLA research cannot show that the practice increases completion rates. The current data is also limited on demonstrating the savings of time and money because only successful PLA students are included in the data. This study suggests that PLA and PLA solutions are tied to problems that there is limited evidence PLA will contribute to solving.

**Research/evidence use.**

The narratives analyzed in this study show that research or evidence is not usually cited in the construction of the PLA narrative (60% n=55). However, in the 40 percent of
narratives \( (n=36) \) that use research, the 2010 CAEL study is overwhelming what is cited. Both of these findings are helpful in understanding PLA policy structure in distinct ways.

First, finding that research or evidence is not usually cited in the construction of the PLA narrative lends support to the NPF assumption that narratives play a central role in the policy process. Without significant research use in the narrative for PLA, the emphasis has been placed on the narrative to support the policy initiative.

Additionally, finding that when research or evidence is used in the construction of the PLA narrative, it is overwhelming one study that is cited, suggests that the pro-PLA policy coalition has successfully created a restricted view of PLA. These findings lend support to the concern expressed in Chapter Two that the current policy process is insular.

**Costs and benefits.**

Findings from this study reveal how the costs and benefits of PLA policy are presented in the narratives. In this study, the narratives were almost evenly split between identifying a cost to the pro-PLA policy solution \( (52\% \ n=47) \) and not identifying a cost to the pro-PLA policy solution \( (48\% \ n=44) \). Therefore, the findings do not clearly indicate whether identifying a policy cost to the proposed policy solution is or is not helpful in the narrative. Among the narratives that identified a cost to increasing the use of PLA, the majority implied the costs to their policy solution would be concentrated \( (64\% \ n=30) \) and the minority implied the costs would be diffused \( (36\% \ n=17) \). The findings do show that the PLA narratives identify a cost to the opposed policy solution \( (93\% \ n=85) \). Among these narratives that identify a cost to not increasing the use of PLA, most imply that the
costs to the opposed policy solution would be concentrated (69% \( n = 58 \)). Interpreting these findings together suggest that the PLA policy narrative is benefiting from identifying a concentrated cost of not increasing the use of PLA, but the narrative is not clearly relying on the identification of a cost to their pro-PLA policy solution.

All the narratives in this study identified a benefit to their proposed pro-PLA policy. Slightly more than half of the narratives (53% \( n = 48 \)) identify that the benefit to their policy solution will be concentrated. However, the benefits of the opposed policy solution (which is to not increase the use of PLA) is only identified in four narratives (4%). These findings suggest that the PLA narratives are primarily constructed on the benefits to the policy proposal but the benefits of the opposed solution are very rarely presented. This does seem to add further support to the concern that the policy process is highly insular and multiple sides of the PLA policy issue are not being presented.

**Stance.**

Analysis of interviews and document in this study reveals that the policy stance most often utilized in PLA narratives is projected to win (72 or 79%). The second most often utilized policy stance in PLA narratives is winning stance (16 or 18%). These findings may suggest that the policy stance is helpful in building a cohesive policy coalition. The findings also may lend support the concern that powerful coalitions who create a strongly believable projected to win narrative may silence or exclude diverse voices in the policy process.
Summary of Findings Concerning Structure of PLA Narratives

Collecting data from seven sources via two methods (interviews and document analysis) allowed a triangulated view of how PLA policy narratives are structured. The data provided an Ohio state level view as well as a national view of PLA policy narratives. The findings from this study reveal that PLA narratives are most often structured with the PLA champion as hero, bureaucracy as villain, and students as victims. The story type is most often victory projected. The narrative typically identifies a mechanical causal mechanism and engages in problem surfing. Overall, most PLA narratives are not based on research or evidence. The data on the narrative presentation of costs and benefits of PLA in the narratives reveals a reliance on the identification of costs to the opposed policy and benefits of the proposed policy. The policy stance in the PLA narratives is primarily projected to win.

Asymmetry, Bias, and Democratic Participation

The third research question addressed in this study was RQ3: What do the PLA narratives suggest about the democratic participation in higher education policy making? The data to address this question comes from both the interviews and the documents.

Several findings in this study suggest PLA policy narratives could be restricting democratic participation in higher education policy making. First, this study demonstrates there is an asymmetrical narrative surrounding PLA policy. There was only one document that contained an anti-PLA stance. Although several documents included anti-PLA statements, the documents themselves contained a pro-PLA stance. Therefore, the anti-PLA statements were contrasted and refuted by the dominant pro-PLA policy
narrative. The limited visibility of the anti-PLA policy stance supports concerns that one side of the PLA policy issue has more power over the narrative framing of the issue.

The second finding that suggests PLA policy narratives could be restricting democratic participation concerns bias. The strategic construction of the PLA policy narrative by the pro-PLA coalition situates the hero external to higher education. Given the larger metanarrative surrounding higher education, this hero construction functions to bias interpretations. The strategic construction of students as victims also function to bias interpretations, particularly when the metanarrative has positively framed the victim group. The casting of bureaucracy in the villain role also functions to bias the interpretation of PLA policy because no one can arguably be in support of bureaucracy. Therefore, the findings of this study support that the PLA narrative is structured in a way that constrains the frame of PLA and may bias interpretation of the policy issue.

**Support for Framework**

The fourth research question addressed in this study was RQ4: What support exists for using the Narrative Policy Framework in researching higher education policy? The data to address this question comes from the spreadsheet created from the data collected from both the interviews and the documents. The data provide several examples of support for using the NPF in higher education policy research.

All the interviews and documents (N=92) contained a PLA policy narrative which provides support for a framework that places narrative in a primary role. Analysis of the structure of the PLA narratives supports the argument that narratives have the potential to
constrict or expand the framing of an issue. This finding also supports the use of a framework that considers the strategic impact of narratives in the policy arena.

NPF supports multiple methods of inquiry and has informed this qualitative study. The structural analysis of policy narratives provided a detailed view of the strategic design of PLA narratives. While this study collected 30 unique data points for each interview and document, the NPF could also support a very general study with fewer structural elements. The ability of NPF to support multiple methods of inquiry and support an expansion or reduction in the scope of the study suggests it is well suited for higher education policy research.

The present study also suggests that NPF provides a way to bridge the gap between education researchers and politicians. For years, scholars have called attention to the divide between academics and policymakers (Ness, 2010). As a result of his study on the use of research findings in policy debates surrounding charter schools, Henig (2009) details five dimensions in which political actors and researchers think differently about evidence.

One of the dimensions of evidence in which political actors and researchers differ is that of causality. As Henig (2009) describes, “building a convincing case about causality is perhaps the most vexing and perplexing challenge researchers face” (p. 145). He discovered that in charter school research there are numerous ways the research is affected by selection bias and other problematic concerns because individual student characteristics are involved in a student’s learning. He argues that researchers look for the potential bias in data. Politicians however, make their careers “by laying bets about likely
causality and by making confident claims attached to convincing narratives” (Henig, p. 146).

Just as Henig (2009) found a tendency for politicians to make causality leaps in the charter school narratives, findings in the present study identify causality leaps in the PLA narratives. Evidence does not currently exist to demonstrate that PLA leads to an increase in completion rates. However, this study reveals that pro-PLA coalitions have narratively tied PLA to the completion agendas. Furthermore, the narrative analysis revealed that 78 percent \((n=71)\) of the documents engaged in problem surfing. However, there is limited evidence PLA will solve the problems that pro-PLA coalitions narratively link PLA with. These types of findings, made visible through narrative policy research guided by the NPF, demonstrate support for the use of this framework in future higher education policy research.

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to detail the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. Analyzing interviews and documents yielded data that helped describe the PLA policy narratives for Ohio policy makers, higher education newspapers, and prominent PLA advocacy groups. Additionally, coding of the interviews and documents provided data that illuminated the structure of the PLA narratives.

The PLA policy narratives for Ohio policy makers cast the PLA champion as hero, and bureaucracy and faculty as villains. The Ohio narratives also cast students, taxpayers, and the state of Ohio as victims. The Ohio PLA policy narratives include a story type is victory projected or truth claim.
Three major findings emerged from the Ohio PLA policy narrative data. First, the state level data showed that PLA is exclusively framed as a positive practice. Second, the state level data revealed that victims are identified in the PLA narratives. The third finding from the Ohio state level data is a heavy reliance on CAEL research. The state level data suggests there is an insular circle of PLA policy voices influencing PLA narratives in Ohio.

The national level perspective of PLA policy narratives was gathered from higher education newspapers and prominent PLA advocacy groups. The higher education newspaper PLA policy narratives cast the PLA champion as hero and bureaucracy as villain. The newspapers cast the student as victim and use a victory projected story type.

Two major findings emerged from the higher education newspaper data. First, the newspaper data revealed that across all the years included in the study, there was only 1 article with an anti-PLA stance. The majority of articles (33 or 77%) contained a pro-PLA stance. The second major finding from the newspapers was that the majority (34 or 79%) of the articles did not use evidence in the PLA narrative.

The PLA advocacy group narratives cast PLA champions as the hero. Only two of the three advocacy groups identified villains. All three advocacy groups cast the students as victims.

Two major findings emerged from the PLA advocacy group data. First, the advocacy group data suggests the PLA narrative is well conceived for the groups’ purposes. By not identifying a villain (CAEL), or identifying bureaucracy as the villain (ACE and Lumina Foundation), the groups ensure they do not alienate their membership.
The second major finding from the advocacy group data was that students are identified as the victim.

Collectively, the data showed that PLA policy narratives identify the causal mechanism to be mechanical. The narratives most frequently (71 or 78%) engage in problem surfing. The problems that the narratives surf to highlight the gap in PLA effectiveness data. The majority of PLA narratives (55 or 60%) are not based on evidence. However, when evidence is used, there is heavy reliance on CAEL research which suggests there is a restricted view of PLA created by the PLA policy narrative.

Several findings suggest PLA policy narratives could be restricting democratic participation in higher education policy making. Findings from the Ohio state level and the national level suggest bias and asymmetry in the PLA policy narratives. While this chapter presented the study’s findings, the next chapter will provide analysis and discussion of the findings.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of this study. The chapter begins with a summary of the study. Study findings are discussed in relation to the research questions. The study findings are also discussed in relation to previous researcher’s findings. Surprising results from this study are also described. Implications for action are presented. Recommendations for future studies and concluding remarks complete this chapter.

Summary of the Study

The role of policy narratives in the higher education policy process is not yet fully understood. However, changes in higher education necessitate scholars consider how narratives may impact policy making. Increasing levels of external pressure to improve affordability and increase completion rates for increasingly diverse students (Association of Governing Boards, 2012; Immerwahr & Johnson, 2007; Kezar, 2005; Picciano & Spring, 2013; Zusman, 1999) is one example of change in higher education that necessitates learning more about policy narratives. As multiple external groups advocate conflicting policy solutions, it would be helpful to understand how policy narratives are used to garner support for a specific policy position.

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the role of policy narratives in the higher education policy process and to extend the testing of a new policy narrative framework to the field of higher education. It was also a purpose of this study to consider how the structure of policy narratives may influence democratic participation in the policy making process. To fulfill the overarching purpose, this research project used the
sample higher education policy issue of PLA. Thus, the most specific purpose of this study was to determine the PLA policy narratives, and the implications of those narratives, at the state level in Ohio, and the national level in higher education newspapers and prominent PLA advocacy groups.

In this research project, four research questions were addressed. The four research questions were:

RQ1: What narratives surround prior learning assessment policy for Ohio policy makers, higher education newspapers, and prominent PLA advocacy groups?

RQ2: How are the narratives surrounding PLA policy structured?

RQ3: What do the PLA narratives suggest about the democratic participation in higher education policy making?

RQ4: What support exists for using the Narrative Policy Framework in researching higher education policy?

To address the research questions, data were collected from both interviews and documents. Interviews were conducted with two Ohio state level policy makers. The Ohio state level policy makers were directly involved with the PLA with a Purpose state-wide PLA initiative. Documents were collected from six different sources. Documents were collected from OBR. Documents were also collected from two higher education newspapers, Inside Higher Ed and The Chronicle of Higher Education. Additionally, documents were collected from the PLA advocacy groups of CAEL, Lumina Foundation, and ACE. A total of 325 documents were evaluated against the inclusion criteria for this study. Ultimately, 89 documents met the criteria for inclusion.
The interviews with Ohio policy makers were coded both inductively and deductively. Inductively, the interviews were coded multiple times and emerging themes were identified. The inductive coding method illuminated details about the framing of PLA, the benefits of PLA for Ohio, faculty opposition, and research support for PLA. Deductively, the interviews were coded using the same coding sheet that was used to code the documents which yielded 30 unique data points for each interview.

The documents (and the deductive coding of Ohio state level interviews) were coded using a coding sheet that was adapted from previous NPF studies (McBeth, Clemons, Husmann, Kusko, & Gaarden, 2014; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Lane, 2013). The coding sheet helped capture narrative policy elements such as characters, story type, causal mechanisms, problem surfing, use of evidence, cost and benefit story, and the policy stance. There were 30 unique data elements generated for each of the documents analyzed. Trends from the data were quantified and themes were identified.

**Addressing the Research Questions**

The research findings detailed in Chapter Four help address the research questions. In response to RQ1, the data support the idea that there are PLA policy narratives for Ohio policy makers, both higher education newspapers, and the three most prominent PLA advocacy groups. The findings suggest that across all the sources considered, there is a pro-PLA bias in the policy narratives.

The Ohio state level PLA policy narratives cast the PLA champion as hero and bureaucracy and faculty as villains. The state level PLA narratives cast the students,
taxpayers, and the state of Ohio as victims. The story type was victory projected or truth claim in the state level PLA policy narratives.

The higher education newspaper PLA policy narratives also cast the PLA champion as hero. Bureaucracy was cast as the villain. The newspaper PLA narratives cast the student as victim and used a victory projected story type.

The PLA advocacy group narratives cast the PLA champion as the hero and the students as the victims. The advocacy group narratives either did not identify a villain (CAEL) or identified bureaucracy (ACE and Lumina Foundation) as villain. Both CAEL and Lumina Foundation used a truth claim story type, and ACE used a victory projected story type.

In response to RQ2, the findings reveal that collectively across all sources the PLA narratives are structured with the PLA champion as hero, bureaucracy as villain, and students as victims. The story type is most often victory projected. The PLA narrative typically identifies a mechanical causal mechanism and engages in problem surfing. Most PLA narratives are not built around science or evidence. The PLA narratives reveal a reliance on the identification of costs to the opposed policy and benefits of the proposed policy. The policy stance in the PLA narratives is projected to win.

In response to RQ3, bias in the PLA policy narratives appears to have a limiting effect on the democratic participation in higher education policy making. The currently dominant policy frame advantages pro-PLA advocates. The dominance of the pro-PLA policy narrative at the Ohio state level, and across the higher education newspapers, suggests that the narrative is excluding multiple democratic participants.
Results suggest that the anti-PLA policy stance is not represented in the dominant PLA policy narrative at the state level in Ohio, or at the national level in the higher education newspapers. The narrative created by pro-PLA advocates places the PLA champion as hero and the students as victims. The use of student as victim allows the PLA advocacy groups to discuss PLA policy with a powerful benevolent frame. The “PLA champion saves student victims” narrative has the potential to bias perceptions of the PLA policy issue.

Locating the hero external to higher education may be an effective policy narrative strategy given the negative frame that the media has embraced for higher education over the last several decades. Previous research demonstrated that media policy narratives influence public opinion on a policy issue (Shanahan, McBeth, & Hathaway, 2011), and advocacy groups who can strategically craft narratives locating themselves as heroes outside the academy may have a framing advantage.

Pro-PLA coalitions have successfully framed the villain as bureaucracy within the dominant PLA policy narrative. From a biasing perspective, this frame may be highly effective because no one can convincingly argue for bureaucracy. This means that any anti-PLA coalitions would need to entirely reframe the policy issue to have a successful counter narrative.

Finding that PLA policy narratives often link PLA to the completion agendas lends support to the idea that the completion agendas have an effect on policies that are successful in narratively linking their solution to those agendas. The policy narrative effect is further demonstrated within this research study because, as was discussed in
Chapter Two, at present, the PLA research cannot show that the practice increases completion rates. The current PLA data is also limited on demonstrating the savings of time and money because only successful PLA students are included in the data. Therefore, this study suggests that PLA and PLA solutions are narratively tied to problems that there is limited evidence PLA will solve.

Finding that when research or evidence is used to construct the PLA narrative there is overwhelming reliance on the CAEL (2010) study suggests that the current policy process is insular. The Lumina Foundation, who has openly proclaimed their mission to effect higher education policy, generously funded the CAEL (2010) study. Then, that research has been the single study most often used to construct the PLA policy narrative, suggesting that the pro-PLA coalition has successfully created a restricted view of PLA.

In response to RQ4, this study suggests there is significant support for using the NPF in researching higher education policy. Finding discernible PLA policy narratives in every interview and document in this study suggests support for the NPF assumption that narratives play a central role in the policy process. Identifying discernible policy narratives at the state level in Ohio policy maker interviews and the state level documents, and at the national level in documents from higher education newspapers and advocacy groups, lends support to the NPF assumption that policy narratives operate at different policy levels.

The design of this study allowed for the exploration of policy narratives created by 7 unique sources. Finding PLA policy narratives across all the sources lends support to the NPF assumption that narratives are generated by a broad set of actors.
The NPF assumption that policies are a translation of beliefs that are communicated through policy narratives appears to be supported in this study. The PLA policy narratives communicate beliefs about the students, the role of PLA champions, and about PLA as a practice to solve specific problems. The beliefs communicated in the PLA narratives are reflected in policy as the PLA policies increase.

**Major Findings**

This study of policy narratives revealed that the majority of PLA narratives are not built around evidence. Given the expansion of PLA policy across the states, and the federal-level discussions about PLA, this suggests narratives are central in the PLA policy process.

This research also suggests that the pro-PLA stance is benefiting from the strategic design of the policy narrative. Linking PLA to the completion agenda benefits the pro-PLA stance. Although there is limited evidence to support that PLA will solve the problems that the completion agenda seeks to address, the PLA policy narrative frames PLA as a solution to the concerns of the completion agenda. The increased policy attention at the state level in Ohio and at the national level in higher education newspapers suggests this narrative strategy is beneficial for PLA advocates.

If PLA is considered as a sample policy issue representing the larger workings of the higher education policy arena, then the findings from this study support a broader concern about the health of democratic participation in higher education policy making. For example, the findings from this research suggest there is an insular circle of policy voices that are influencing the expansion of PLA policy. The Lumina Foundation funded
the research conducted by CAEL (2010). CAEL then provided support to the Ohio state-wide PLA initiative. Data from the Ohio state level interviews and documents show a heavy reliance on the same CAEL research when framing benefits of PLA. So, if PLA is an effective sample, then the finding that there is an insular circle of policy voices may also hold across the population of higher education policy making.

Another finding from this study supports a broader concern about the health of democratic participation in higher education policy making. In this study, 100% of the Ohio state level interviews and documents contained a pro-PLA stance. Among the higher education newspapers, 77% \((n=33)\) of the PLA documents contained a pro-PLA stance. And not surprisingly, 100% of the PLA advocacy group documents contain a pro-PLA stance. Through the dominant pro-PLA narrative frame, faculty are argued to “misunderstand” or “worry needlessly” when they have objections to PLA. Faculty are not framed as having valid concerns formed from an informed understanding of what PLA or the completion agendas mean to higher education and the students. Thus, the pro-PLA frame works to restrict democratic participation in policy making.

Overall, the PLA policy narratives analyzed in this study are best considered within the nested narratives depicted in Figure 2 in Chapter Two of this document. As was discussed in Chapter Two, the layers of narratives both inform yet shield this analysis of the PLA policy narratives. For example, the narratives created by the completion agendas influence the PLA policy narratives analyzed in this study. Thus, the analysis of PLA policy narratives is both informed by and builds to a broader higher education policy narrative. As narrative scholars remind, narratives are contextual,
situated, and ever-changing (Harter, Japp, & Beck, 2005). Therefore, as scholars, our study of narratives are “not finalized or finalizable—they remain partial and indeterminate” (Japp, Harter, & Beck, 2005, p. 6). When studying narratives, scholars Harter, Japp, and Beck (2005) argue that, “any scholarly performance ought to be understood as situated, contingent, partial, and subject to revision. Narrativity and narrative scholarship are inherently open-ended…” (p. 25). This means that the findings and the interpretations of the findings in this study are best considered as situated narratives.

**Findings Related to the Literature**

Researchers found that when it comes to persuading an audience, heroes are the key elements of a policy narrative (Jones, 2014; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Lane, 2013). In this study, analysis of PLA policy narratives show that the PLA champion is consistently cast in the hero role. Across all 7 data sources used in this study, the PLA champion as hero is consistent. This strategic creation of the hero appears to be advantaging pro-PLA coalitions in the higher education policy arena.

Researchers found that when the victims of a policy issue are socially constructed in a positive light, the policy outcome tends to favor that group (Schneider, Ingram, & Deleon, 2014). In this study, the students were cast as the victims. The narrative descriptions of the students appeared to be strategic because, depending on the document’s intended audience, the student-victims were described differently than they were in documents with different intended audiences. As examples, in some PLA narratives, the victims were “hardworking, adult students.” In other PLA narratives, the
victims were military and veteran students, and PLA policy was positioned as a way to “support Ohio veterans.” Thus, this study lends support of the findings that a positive social construction of the victim can favor the advocacy group championing that narrative.

In this study, the PLA narratives in higher education newspapers spanning between 2009 to August, 2015, contained a pro-PLA policy stance in 77 percent of the documents. Only one document appeared in that six-year time span that had an anti-PLA stance. The remaining 22 percent of the documents contained a balanced stance on PLA. Because prior research has demonstrated that the media’s policy narratives influence individual policy opinions (Shanahan, McBeth, & Hathaway, 2011), this finding suggests the PLA policy narratives in *Inside Higher Ed* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* are advantaging the pro-PLA advocacy stance.

Previous research demonstrated that labeling a “victory” story type was helpful in describing what was occurring in a disputed policy issue (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Lane, 2013). Originally, Stone (2002) suggested the two dominant policy story types are stories of decline and stories of control. Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, and Lane (2013) added the victory story type to their coding when researching policy narratives associated with the installation of wind turbines off Nantucket. However, in the present study, the victory story type label was not effective in capturing the story type of the PLA policy narratives. Instead, in this study of PLA, the more accurate label for the story type was “victory projected.” If future higher education policy narrative studies also code for a
victory projected story type, researchers may begin to understand if that is a more applicable label for what higher education policy scholars interpret.

Roe (1994) contends that “asymmetrical narratives” can help expose power differentials in the policy process. Roe argues,

For policy issues so complex and uncertain that it is not possible to determine what are the ‘objectively weaker arguments,’ asymmetrical narratives used to make sense of these issues are the only index we have that unequal power relations are working themselves out through these policy narratives, through their asymmetries, through getting people to change their stories (1994, p. 72).

Findings from this study suggest that the PLA policy narratives are asymmetrical. The pro-PLA policy stance appeared in 88 percent of the policy narratives. It is not surprising to find PLA advocacy group narratives to be exclusively pro-PLA; however, it is revealing that the Ohio policy maker interviews and all the Ohio documents were exclusively pro-PLA. Additionally, it is telling that 77 percent of the higher education newspaper documents were also pro-PLA. With only one document in this study revealing an anti-PLA policy stance, these findings suggest an asymmetrical narrative exists with regard to PLA policy.

The asymmetrical narratives in this study could demonstrate, as Roe (1994) would suggest, that there are unequal power relations involved in PLA policy. The Lumina Foundation’s strategic grant-awarding to effect state-level higher education policy represents a powerful PLA advocacy force. CAEL has provided support to the state of Ohio to encourage a state-wide PLA initiative. And ACE is a powerful member
organization. Collectively, these pro-PLA advocacy forces have effectively framed the PLA policy issue to advantage their coalition’s policy solution. However, the results of this study demonstrate that there is no active counter argument. Thus, this research supports the contention that the power relations involved in PLA policy have a restricting effect on the democratic participation in higher education policy making.

**Surprises**

Several discoveries were surprising in this research project. First, the number of PLA documents that fit the study criteria was surprising. The researcher expected a greater number of PLA documents to exist. Given the expansion of PLA policy, both in Ohio and across other states, it was surprising that the document totals were what they were. The expansion of PLA has several practical consequences. For example, if advocates get PLA expenses covered by federal grants and loans, there could be a redistribution of student dollars to assessment specialists, and away from education specialists. Yet, the counter argument from an anti-PLA viewpoint is not represented in the state or national level PLA policy narratives.

An issue emerged from the interviews with Ohio state level policy makers that was also surprising. According to one of the policy makers, the responsibility for earning PLA credit was placed on the student to demonstrate that the learning was college-level. For the other policy maker, the onus was placed on traditional higher education institutions and individuals to prove that there is a difference between learning acquired in college and learning acquired through work or life experiences. This difference in perspectives is an example of why it is increasingly important to study policy narratives.
Ultimately, if a distinction is made between what students learn through formal and informal means it will be determined by a contest of narratives. Related to this finding, almost 100 years ago Dewey (1916) wrote, “Hence one of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope is the method of keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional, modes of education” (p. 12). This study highlights that the challenge of addressing such philosophical questions in the higher education policy arena is impacted by policy narratives.

**Implications for Action**

This policy narrative study has implications for both action and theory. This study supports previous demonstrations of the value of studying policy narratives. The present study begins to extend knowledge of the usefulness of studying policy narratives in higher education policy making. Therefore, this study suggests expanding the content of higher education policy classes to include discussions on policy narratives. Even traditional quantitative policy research may be contextually informed through consideration of narrative.

Additionally, this study suggests the importance of educating democratic participants about the strategic use of policy narratives in higher education. Educators can encourage and guide democratic participants in learning how to analyze the communication surrounding policy issues. They can advocate that individuals critically examine the metanarratives as well as the specific policy issue narratives to evaluate what
the narrative both reveals and conceals. In this way, educators can contribute to the health of the democratic policy making system.

This study also demonstrates the importance of participating in the policy making dialogue. The present study raises concern that some higher education policy decisions may be increasingly made solely by administrators and state-level policy makers without faculty dialog. As Dewey (1916, 1927) argues, democracy requires effort. If higher education intends to continue under a model of democratic policy making, then it requires multiple voices to actively participate in policy making. Faculty members are diverse in their disciplines and perspectives, having their voices appear in policy issue narratives such as those concerning PLA could increase the likelihood that higher education policy would be a product of democratic participation.

If higher education policy stakeholders aim to have more balanced, less biased, and more democratic policy making, then discourse will need to progress differently in the future. In the case of PLA policy discourse, results from this study suggest that purposive inclusion of diverse voices will require change in the status quo. Higher education popular press and state level policy makers should consider the PLA policy narratives of faculty, students, and institution level leaders as equally valid interpretations of PLA compared to those of PLA advocacy groups. In the future, to reduce the bias identified in this study of PLA policy narratives, the interpretations of PLA presented by policy stakeholders such as faculty members should not be portrayed as uninformed points of view. As Dewey (1916, 1927) argues, all democratic participants can contribute a unique perspective. However, when the higher education popular press or state level
policy makers marginalize the PLA views of faculty by referring to them as resistance, the ability of faculty members to discursively participate in democratic policy making is diminished. Therefore, democratic participation in higher education policy making could be improved through conscious attempts at presenting various PLA arguments as equally informative for effective policy making.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the results of this study, future NPF research centered on contested policy issues within higher education is recommended. It would be informative if narrative policy research were conducted on a higher education policy issue that involved more diverse narrative contributors than appeared in the present study of PLA narratives. This study of PLA policy narratives did not reveal that faculty have a voice in this specific policy issue narrative, and it would be helpful if future research explores how faculty policy narratives are formed and distributed.

The NPF was helpful in highlighting power differentials through PLA policy narratives. Through further application of the framework, scholars may discover more about how power exerts itself in higher education policy issues. Policy researchers can better support democratic participation in policy making if we expand our understanding of how various coalitions exert power during the higher education policy making process. NPF proved helpful in uncovering power differences in this initial study, and therefore, future use of the framework in higher education policy studies is recommended.

The intent of this research was to study policy narratives. PLA served as the sample policy issue through which to explore policy narratives. The findings support that
PLA policy narratives exist and they are structured in a way that is advantaging the pro-PLA policy stance. The present study does suggest the dominant pro-PLA policy narrative is advantaging that policy stance; however, additional research is necessary to better explain why PLA policy is increasing.

**Concluding Remarks**

In theorizing on the future of the NPF, Shanahan, McBeth, and Jones (2014) pose an important question for researchers:

What we are arguing is that the NPF can be used in the study of democracy and power. But a resurgence of literature that questions the relevance of public opinion in decision making and leans toward elite domination (e.g., Gilens and Page 2014; Grossman 2014) raises a critical question for NPF research: what if public opinion does not matter? (p. 257)

Based on Dewey’s (1916) philosophy of democracy, this researcher argues that public opinion must be made to matter. If democracy is, as Dewey suggests, intertwined with communication and education, then when we lose communication in democracy, we lose it in education. Critically exploring policy narratives and educating about how they can influence policy outcomes is a way to ensure public opinion matters in policy making. As educators we have a responsibility to educate democratic participants about the use of power and strategy in policy making so public opinion has an opportunity to emerge in the process.

The results of this study suggest that the study of policy narratives provides an opportunity to expand understanding of the higher education policy arena. Although the
findings suggest the particular policy issue of PLA has a policy narrative that is restricting democratic participation from diverse stakeholders, it does not mean public opinion does not matter. Instead, finding the exclusion of diverse voices in the policy making process and then educating democratic participants about those findings can be a valuable contribution to the health of the democratic system. Narrative policy studies may provide a way to learn more about the strategies used to exclude diverse voices in higher education policy narratives. With a greater understanding of power and strategy, we can educate stakeholders to ensure the higher education policy making system is not exclusionary and elitist.

Specific to the policy issue of PLA, this study suggests that the pro-PLA policy stance is advantaged by the structure and quantitative dominance of the pro-PLA policy narrative. However, critiquing a policy narrative is not enough to dislodge it from dominance (Birnbaum & Shushok, 2001; Roe, 1994). If anti-PLA advocates seek to restrict the expansion of PLA policy at the federal, state, or institutional levels, the present study suggests that anti-PLA advocates will need to create a more compelling narrative than is currently being presented by pro-PLA advocates. Thus, this study supports the contention that strategic use of policy narratives is an important consideration for oppositional coalitions trying to effect PLA policy making.
References


Ohio Department of Higher Education. (nd.). About the Ohio Department of Higher Education. Retrieved from https://www.ohiohighered.org/board


Appendix A: IRB Approval

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2. research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: Prior Learning Assessment Policy: What is the Story?

Primary Investigator: Monica Hatfield Price

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Laura Harrison

Department: Education

Robin Stack, CIP, Human Subjects Research Coordinator
Office of Research Compliance

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
Appendix B: IRB Approved Consent Form

Ohio University Consent Form

**Title of Research:** Prior Learning Assessment Policy Narratives

**Researchers:** Monica Hatfield Price

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to participate in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Explanation of the study**
This study is being done to determine if there are narratives that may explain the recent increase in prior learning assessment policy. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer interview questions which will be audio recorded. Your participation in the study will last the length of the interview which could be 20 to 40 minutes in length.

**Risks and Discomforts**
No risks or discomforts are anticipated.

**Benefits**
You may not benefit, personally by participating in this study. However, this study is important to science/society because an increased understanding of the policy process allows policy makers to improve the process.

**Confidentiality and Records**
Your study information will be kept confidential by the researcher. Your name and job position will not be identified. Furthermore, after the audio-recording of the interview is transcribed, the recording will be destroyed and there will be no personal identifiers associated with each interview transcript.

**Contact Information**
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me at 614-83X-XXXX or by email at mp138802@ohio.edu. Or, you may also contact my Advisor, Dr. Laura Harrison at harrisol@ohio.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.
By agreeing to participate in this study, you are agreeing that:

1. you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;
2. you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;
3. you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;
4. you are 18 years of age or older;
5. your participation in this research is completely voluntary;
6. you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Introduction: My name is Monica and I am a PhD. student at Ohio University. For my dissertation, I am researching Prior Learning Assessment policy narratives. I would like to interview you for my research. The interview could last 20 to 40 minutes. I want you to be aware that I will NOT be using names or personal identifiers in the report. When I present the results, I will be using fictitious names and identifying interview participants as “state-level policymakers” and “campus-level policymakers.” I will audio-record the interview, however, after the interview has been transcribed, the recording will be destroyed. This Consent Form (hand them document or read it to them if we are on the phone) will provide information for you to decide if you are willing to participate. Do you have any questions about the interview process or your confidentiality? Are you willing to participate in an interview with me?

Interview Questions:

How would you describe what prior learning assessment is?
Who benefits from prior learning assessment?
Why is prior learning assessment important for Ohio?
Why is attention to prior learning assessment policy increasing now instead of 10 years ago?
Do you think the push for prior learning assessment policy is coming from students, administrators, faculty members, advocacy groups, legislators, media, or other groups?
In your opinion, what research data is most supportive of prior learning assessment?
What are the concerns associated with prior learning assessment?
Could there be any unintended consequences from increased use of prior learning assessment?
What are the challenges associated with a state-wide prior learning assessment initiative?
What are the challenges associated with a campus-wide prior learning assessment initiative?
Who or what presents the most opposition to prior learning assessment?
Currently, students are not allowed to use federal student loans to pay for prior learning assessments. Do you feel students should be allowed to use federal student loans to pay for prior learning assessments?

Concluding Statement: Thank you again for participating in this research project. Just a reminder: Your responses will not be personally identifiable. After the interviews are transcribed, I will analyze the responses to determine if there are narrative policy themes. Then, I will be conducting document analysis on advocacy groups’ policy materials to determine if there are narrative policy themes apparent in the documents. If you have any questions, or would like to talk further about this project, please feel free to contact me.

Monica Hatfield Price home phone: 614-83X-XXXX email: mp138802@ohio.edu
Appendix D: Step-By-Step Detail for Accessing Study Documents

Accessing Ohio Board of Regents Documents
To collect the document data from the Ohio Board of Regents, I first went to their website which was ohiohighered.org. I went to the dropdown menu of Agency Initiatives and selected PLA with A Purpose. I compared every document contained in the About, Members, Meetings, and Resources tabs against the inclusion criteria for this study.

Additional Ohio Board of Regents document data was also collected. From the OBR website, I again went to the dropdown menu of Agency Initiatives. I selected the Education for Veterans tab. Under the Education for Veterans tab, I selected the Ohio Values Veterans tab. I compared every document contained in the Overview, Team, Meetings, Important Documents, and OVV Toolkit tabs against the inclusion criteria for this study.

Accessing Inside Higher Ed Documents
To collect the document data from the higher education newspaper Inside Higher Ed, I went to their website which was insidehighered.com. Their website was enabled with search capabilities, therefore, from the search bar I conducted a search for documents. I conducted one search using “prior learning assessment” and another search using “credit for prior learning.” I compared every document that emerged from the searches against the inclusion criteria.

Accessing The Chronicle of Higher Education Documents
To collect the document data from the higher education newspaper The Chronicle of Higher Education, I went to their website which was chronicle.com. Their website was enabled with search capabilities, therefore I conducted a search for documents from the search bar. I conducted one search using “prior learning assessment” and another search using “credit for prior learning” just as I had on the previous higher education newspaper website. Then, I compared every document that emerged from the searches against the inclusion criteria.

Accessing CAEL Documents
To collect the document data from the advocacy group CAEL, I went to their website which was cael.org. From their homepage, I went to the What We Do dropdown menu. I selected the Prior Learning Assessment tab. I compared every document under that tab against the inclusion criteria. Additionally, from the What We Do dropdown menu, I selected the Public Policy tab. I also compared every document under that tab against the inclusion criteria.

Accessing Lumina Foundation Documents
To collect the document data from the advocacy group Lumina Foundation, I went to their website which was luminafoundation.org. Their website was enabled with search capabilities. From the website’s search bar, I conducted a search using “prior learning assessment” and another search using “credit for prior learning.” I compared every document that emerged from the searches against the inclusion criteria.

Accessing ACE Documents
To collect the document data from the advocacy group ACE, I went to their website which was acenet.edu. Their website was enabled with search capabilities. From the website’s search bar, I conducted two searches. I conducted a search using “prior learning assessment” and another search using “credit for prior learning.” I compared every document that emerged from the searches against the inclusion criteria.
Appendix E: Coding Sheet

(Adapted from Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Lane, 2013; McBeth, Clemons, Husmann, Kusko, & Gaarden, 2014)

Policy narrative number
Date of narrative (month and year)
Advocacy Coalition: Pro-PLA Anti-PLA

Document type (circle one): interview transcript; state-level policy document; speech; newsletter; national-level policy document; other

CORE STORY ELEMENTS

1. HERO/ALLY. Who is/are the direct or implied hero(es)/allies identified in the narrative?

TOTAL

1a. bureaucracy concern is hero
1b. PLA champion is hero
1c. completion-agenda champion is hero
1d. higher education quality champion is hero
1e. faculty member is hero
1f. student is hero (what type of student? traditional, adult, minority, other)

2. VILLAIN. Who is/are the direct or implied villains(s) identified in the narrative?

TOTAL

2a. bureaucracy is villain
2b. PLA champion is villain
2c. completion-agenda champion is villain
2d. higher education quality champion is villain
2e. faculty member is villain
2f. student is villain (what type of student? traditional, adult, minority, other)

3. VICTIM. Who is/are the direct or implied victim(s) identified in the narrative?

TOTAL

3a. taxpayers are the victim(s)
3b. students are the victim(s) (what type of student? traditional, adult, minority, )
3c. U.S. as global-competitor is the victim
3d. higher education quality is the victim
3e. faculty members are the victim(s)

4. STORY TYPE.

Does the narrative have a story type(s)? Yes______ or No________
If yes, what kind?

4a. stymied progress
4b. story of decline
4c. change-is-only-an-illusion
4d. helplessness and control
4e. conspiracy
4f. blame-the-victim
4g. truth claim
4h. victory

5. CAUSAL MECHANISM.

Does the narrative have direct or implied causal theory/theories? Yes______ or No________
If yes, what kind?

5a. intentionality
5b. mechanical
5c. inadvertence
5d. accidental

6. PROBLEM SURFING.

Does the narrative tie PLA or PLA solutions to other problems? (Ex: national security, economic preparedness, increased cost of higher education, national crisis of worker-shortage)

Yes______ or No________
If yes, what is (are) these problem(s)?

_____________________________________________________________________

7. SOLUTION.
Does the narrative offer a policy solution? Yes_______ or No_________
If yes, what is the solution?
______________________________________________________________

8. SCIENCE/EVIDENCE.

Is science/evidence cited in the narrative? Yes_________ or No___________
If yes, what science is being used?
______________________________________________________________

How is the science/evidence used?
_____ 8a. to support their argument
_____ 8b. to refute an argument
_____ 8c. matter-of-fact

POLICY NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

9. COSTS.

a. Does the narrative imply or suggest that there are costs to their policy solution?
   Yes__No___

   If yes, who/what entities bear the cost(s)? _______________________________
   Are the costs concentrated or diffused?

b. Does the narrative imply or suggest that there are costs to the opposed policy solution?

   If yes, who/what entities bear the cost(s)? _______________________________
   Are the costs concentrated or diffused?

10. BENEFITS.

a. Does the narrative imply or suggest that there are benefit(s) to their policy solution?
   Yes__No_

   If yes, who/what entities bear the benefits? _______________________________
   Are the benefits concentrated or diffused?

b. Does the narrative imply or suggest that there are benefit(s) to the opposed policy solution?
If yes, who/what entities bear the benefits? ________________________________
Are the benefits concentrated or diffused? ________________________________

11. STANCE. On the whole, what kind of policy stance does the document or video portray or construct?

  ___ 11a. winning stance (winning the “war”)
  ___ 11b. winning the battle, losing the war
  ___ 11c. losing stance
  ___ 11d. can’t tell
  ___ 11e. no stance
  ___ 11f. projected to win