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## The Engaged Department Initiative: GVSU, GRCC, and Aquinas Join Forces for Place-Based Impact

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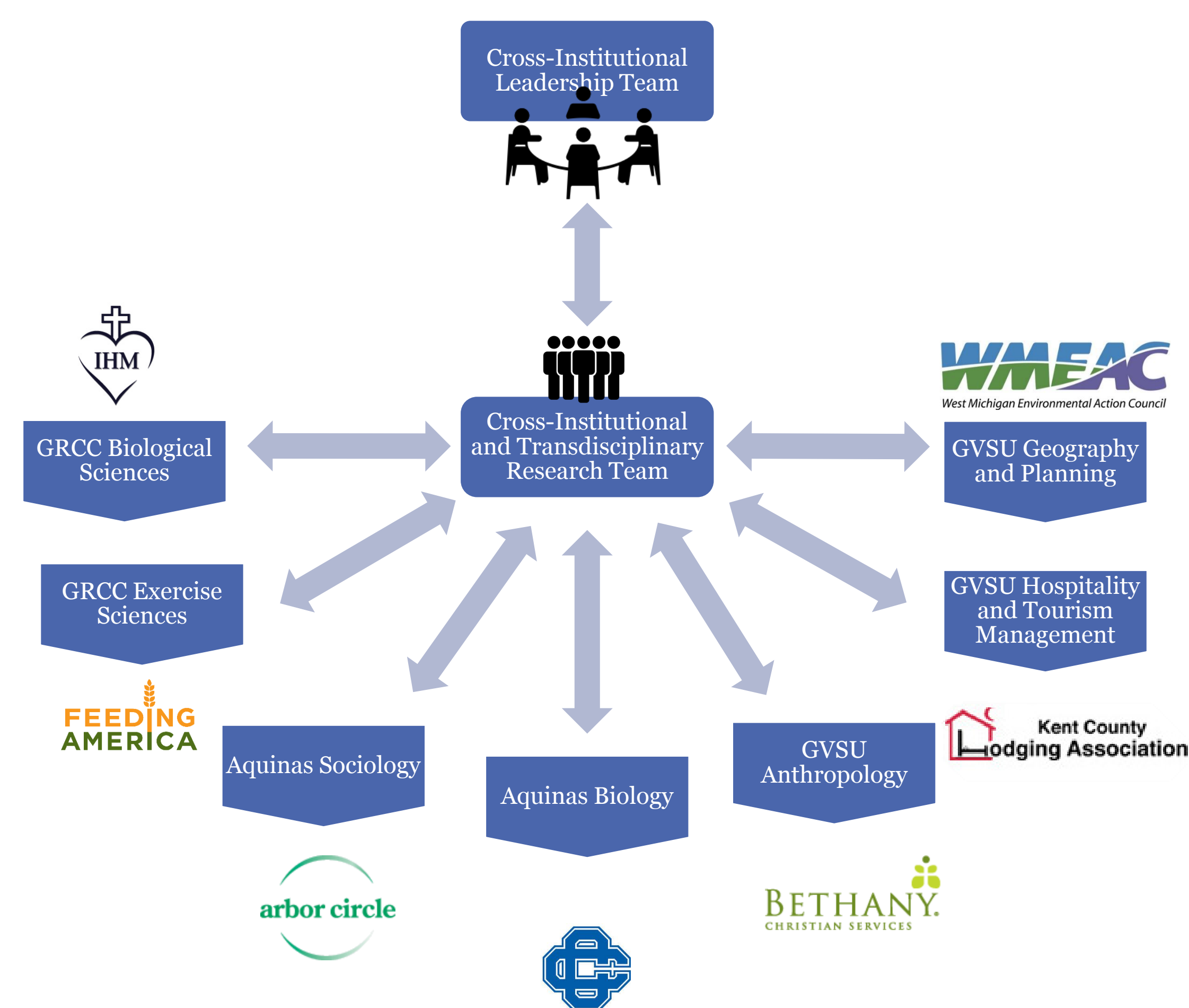
# The Engaged Department Initiative: GVSU, GRCC, and Aquinas Join Forces for Place-Based Impact

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## Abstract

The Engaged Department Initiative (EDI) is a place-based cross-institutional collaboration located in the Grand Rapids region. Participating organizations include Michigan Campus Compact (MiCC), Grand Valley State University (GVSU), Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC), and Aquinas College (AQ). This innovative ethnographic case study is focused on evaluating how well the initiative completes its goals of increasing faculty knowledge and skills, expanding students' community engagement opportunities, fostering intra- and inter- collaborations between the three institutions of higher education, and enhancing community partnerships. The hopes of this initiative is to make a real difference in the community and to create engaged citizens. By disseminating this research, we aspire to offer recommendations for people interested in spanning boundaries and working on place-based change in their own region.

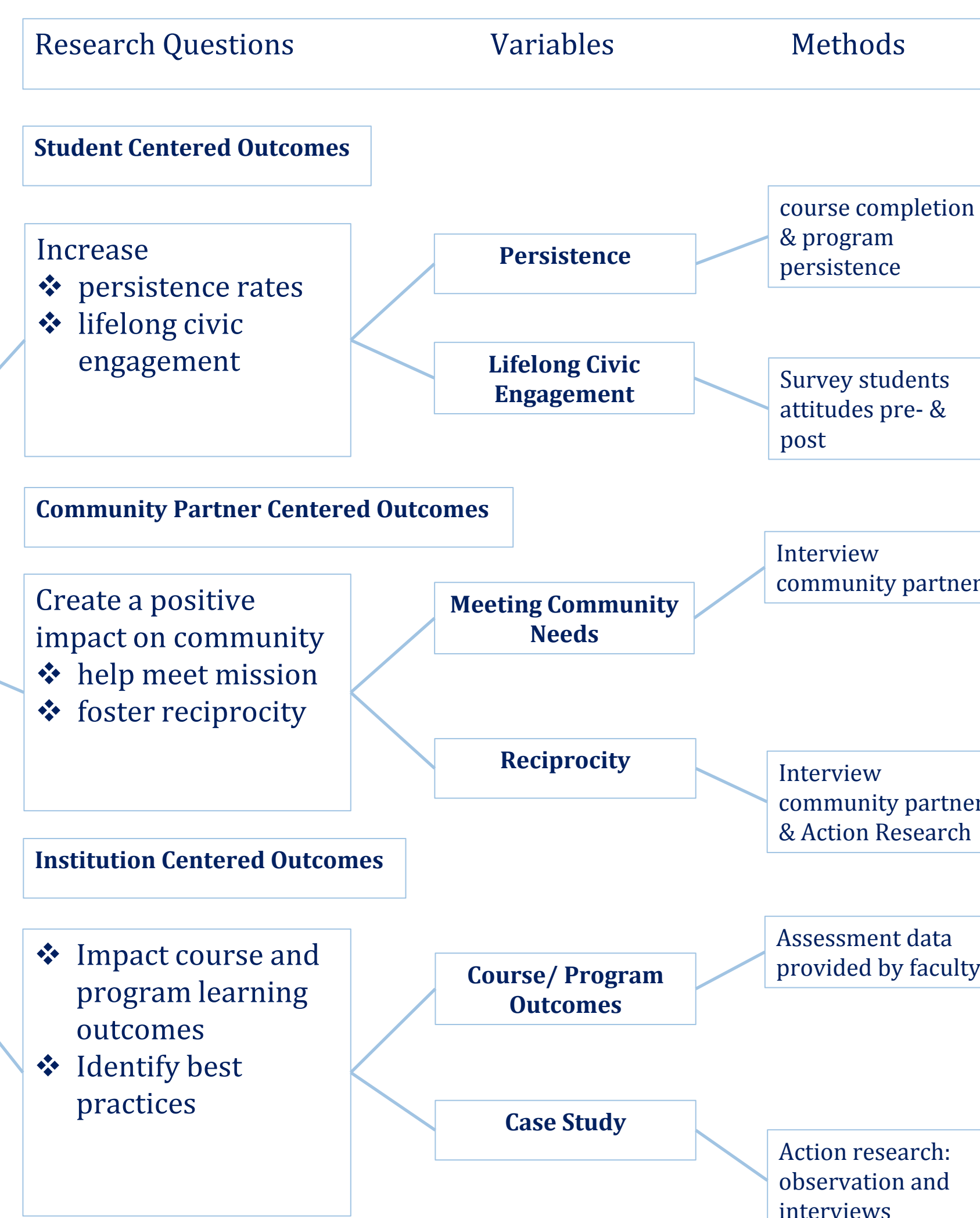
## Background



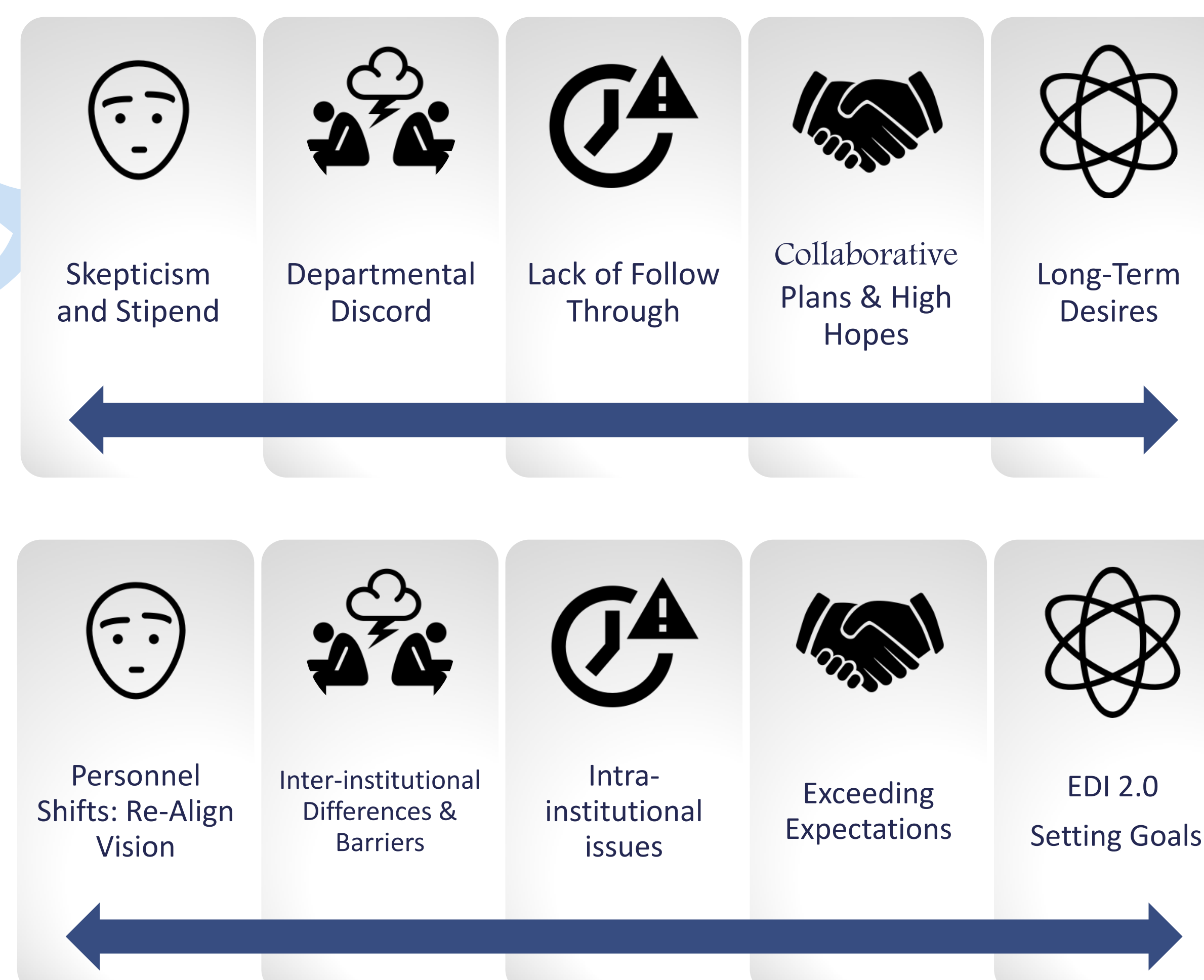
As a collaboration between GVSU, GRCC, AQ, and MiCC, the engaged department initiative was created in order for participating departments to integrate community engagement within their courses. The research team was given the task to evaluate this initiative as an ethnographic case study and utilize systemic action research (SAR). Participating departments are GVSU's Anthropology, Geography and Planning, and Hospitality and Tourism Management; GRCC's Exercise Science and Biological Sciences; and AQ's Sociology and Biology. The research team assigned to this initiative has cross-disciplinary training in Anthropology; Economics; Education; Public, Non-Profit, and Health Administration; and Public Philosophy and are spread throughout all educational institutions.

## Methodology

Our multi-site ethnographic cross-disciplinary research team evaluated this initiative through utilizing both traditional research methods and systemic action research practices (Burns, 2014). This approach allows us to conduct our research and give real time feedback designed to help participants respond to issues as they emerge. Data was collected through qualitative and quantitative measures, building upon previously methodology (Vogelgesang & Misa, 2002; Howe *et al.*, 2010). Qualitative measures included observational data collected at meetings evaluating faculty, community partners, and students. Quantitative measures encompassed surveys, interviews, and calculations on retention rates.



## Initial Findings



## Recommendations



### Faculty -to- Community Collaborations

We must consider how faculty expertise and connections may be a valuable resource.

### Inclusion of Students in Planning Process

Students experience the curriculum first-hand and could be consulted more directly and consistently throughout the EDI process.

### Assessment of Community Member Needs

What the organization wants and what the user wants are not always synonymous.

### Cross-Institutional Teamwork Potentially Lost

Centered cross-institutional collaboration has been stymied by the challenge of curricular change.

### Movement Beyond Disciplinary Lens

The EDI recognizes the need for transdisciplinary, place-based engagement, but has not been able to foster it.

## Acknowledgements

Burns, D. (2014). Assessing Impact in Dynamic and Complex Environments: Systemic Action Research and Participatory Systemic Inquiry. *Centre for Development Impact: Practice Paper, 8*, 1-10. [www.ids.ac.uk/cdi](http://www.ids.ac.uk/cdi)

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