# UNDERSTANDING THE COLLEGE COMPLETION AGENDA ON A COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS

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# DEDICATION

To my husband, Shawn Cox, thank you for your support and patience without which I could not have made it this far, not only with the dissertation, but in life. Thank you for choosing me. I love you.

To my daughter, Chace Brose, the thought of you pushed me on when I needed it most. I love you to the moon and back.

The faith you both continuously have in me, even when I am at my worst, leaves me in awe.

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Former President Obama and business leaders placed community colleges at the center of a plan to avoid a shortage of skilled workers, relying heavily on the 2-year institutions to educate prospective employees and, thereby, uplift the nation's economy (Bailey, 2012) Several non-governmental organizations and charitable foundations responded by creating various national degree completion programs, known as the College Completion Agenda (CCA). In the push to increase degrees, student-learning outcomes may be overlooked and faculty roles ignored by external agencies and institutional administrators. There continues to be little empirical research focused on understanding practitioner knowledge and experiences regarding college degree attainment initiatives. The inclusion of both administrator and faculty experiences provided a rich empirical dataset relevant to ongoing national conversation about reconciling emphasis on graduation statistics and learning outcomes in the evaluation of college completion initiatives.

This case study explored the lived experiences of 5 administrators and 6 faculty members while implementing degree completion initiatives on an urban community college campus. Five themes and six sub-themes emerged from the data and revealed both the processes and possibilities for future reform initiatives. While collaborating with Achieving the Dream (AtD) coaches, participants spoke about developing a data driven picture of the institution's strengths and weaknesses. Multiple course redesigns transpired in those programs where the greatest student attrition occurred, beginning with developmental math and English courses to college credit-bearing classes required for a degree. An outcome of these restructured courses was a "set curriculum" and assessment across all course sections. Quad-C administrators increased their dedication to increasing degrees through faculty professional development, partnering with Complete College America, and a new strategic plan. As result, more students began to successfully complete their courses, and the institution experienced an increase in persistence and retention rates, and college degrees. An open social system model was applied to the data in a post hoc fashion as a tool to examine first, the interaction between the environment and the institution and second, the interaction taking place internally between the multiple sub-systems of actors.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last thirty years, the development of innovative technologies has increased communication and enhanced transportation infrastructures, enabling greater national and international connection (Houghton & Sheehan, 2000). Global interdependence on manufactured goods and services has created a free market, thus increasing intense competition and profit for U. S companies (Houghton & Sheehan, 2000, p. 7; Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006). With a demand to meet accelerated business operations and intense global competition, corporations rely on the dissemination and generation of knowledge that enhances the dynamic production and marketing of goods and services to remain competitive (Powell & Snellman, 2004). Globalization has created a knowledge-based economy in which "production and services [are] based on knowledge-intensive activities" (p. 201). Businesses rely on a skilled labor force to increase and enhance the generation of ideas. Higher education institutions play a critical role in this environment.

The nation's workforce must have knowledge-based skills to create new, innovative ideas and to operate in a service sector that develops those ideas (Powell & Snellman, 2004). Employees working in a knowledge-economy should possess advanced skills often acquired through postsecondary education of some sort, such as effective and timely communication in a diverse setting, global knowledge and language, critical thinking and ethical problem solving (Casner-Lotto, 2006; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014). However, there is a gap between the skills required to work in this economy and the skills of the current workforce. The need for skilled employees in large numbers will only continue to grow, as new jobs are created and the pending mass retirement of Baby Boomers unfolds. A recent Lumina Foundation report estimates 55 million new job positions will come open by 2020, all requiring advanced skills, and ipso facto, a college degree (Carnavale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013).

Businesses rely on higher education institutions to produce knowledgeable graduates with advanced skills earned through postsecondary credentials such as a career certificate or a college degree. Employees need to earn a family-supporting income that only advanced skilled-jobs can offer (American College Testing [ACT], n. d.). Community colleges play a prominent role in meeting these demands.

Since former President Obama's 2009 Address to the Joint Session of Congress Community colleges have moved to the forefront of these conversations about the role of higher education in meeting needs for skilled workers. The president deemed community colleges a catalyst to strengthen the workforce, as half of the students enrolled in higher education attend these institutions (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2014; Obama, 2009a). In response to the president's

declaration and to support the nation's workforce, several non-governmental organizations and charitable foundations have created various national degree completion programs (Russell, 2011). The term College Completion Agenda (CCA) is used eponymously as a reference for at least 13 national degree attainment initiatives (AACC, 2015e).

## Problem Statement

By 2020, two-thirds of American jobs will require employees to acquire postsecondary credentials as part of their job preparation (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010; Complete College America, 2011). To meet the needs of a globalized, knowledge-based economy, American employers expect employees to possess a wide spectrum of skills such intercultural knowledge and communication skills, data mastery, and ethical reasoning. Failing to fill these jobs with appropriately prepared employees is detrimental to the country's future economic growth and to individual employees' opportunity to achieve financial stability (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2004). Former President Obama and business leaders place community colleges at the center of a plan to avoid a shortage of skilled workers, relying heavily on the 2-year institutions to educate prospective employees and, thereby, uplift the nation's economy (Bailey, 2012). Community colleges are important to this plan, as almost half of the students enrolled in higher education today attend these institutions (American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 2012). The push to increase the number of adults holding a postsecondary degree has influenced several non-governmental organizations and charitable foundations to develop and implement various nationwide initiatives (Russell, 2011), collectively known as The College Completion Agenda (CCA).

In the push to increase degrees, student-learning outcomes may be overlooked (Rhoades, 2012). For instance, in 2004 Achieving the Dream (AtD), a CCA initiative sponsored by the Lumina Foundation, set out to create systemic reform in colleges by collecting and analyzing institutional data on student characteristics, retention and degree completion, state and institutional leadership practice (Humphreys, 2011; Jenkins, 2011). Lumina's 2009 program evaluation revealed that the 27 community colleges involved with AtD focused on factors such as improving institutional data analysis and student support services such as academic counseling and tutoring, but they did not focus on student learning outcomes (Rutschow et al., 2011). Furthermore, the evaluation also showed that most colleges overlooked the role of faculty in student learning, and as a result, likely did not include faculty in major decisions regarding institutional reform to improve degree completion rates.

State legislatures and accrediting bodies, on the other hand, place the responsibility of developing and evaluating learning outcomes on community college faculty (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). Even when scholars of higher education argue the importance of faculty in efforts to improve student outcomes (Bensimon, 2007; Birnback & Friedman, 2009; Jenkins, 2011; Rhoades, 2012), there continues to be little empirical research focused on understanding practitioner knowledge and experiences regarding college degree attainment initiatives (Bradburn & Townsend, 2014). The relationship between faculty and the administrators who oversee college completion initiatives also deserves attention, given the important role administrators play in establishing a culture that supports degree attainment through strategies and programs (United States Department of Education, 2012). The college reform discourse will

benefit from the inclusion of the community college administrator and faculty perspectives and knowledge, because institutions must provide quality degrees to be of any use to the knowledge economy and the workforce (Kolb, Kalina, & Chapman, 2013).

## Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what it means to administrators and faculty to have a degree completion initiative on campus. The inclusion of both administrator and faculty experiences provided a rich empirical dataset relevant to ongoing national conversation about reconciling emphasis on graduation statistics and learning outcomes in the evaluation of college completion initiatives. This case study discovered rich information of the lived experience of participants, allowing for clearer understanding of CCA efforts on an urban community college campus.

### Research Questions

- How are Complete College America initiatives implemented on a community college campus?
    - What is the faculty experience of the process of implementing the CCA agenda?
    - What is the administrators' experience of the process of implementing the CCA agenda?

## Significance of the Study

This study will increase the minimal empirical research on community college faculty involved in college completion initiatives (Bradburn & Townsend, 2014; Jenkins, 2011; Levin, et al., 2006). Furthermore, the study may enhance practitioner and

administrator collaboration efforts in institutional reform activities that increase positive student outcomes. Above all, the study has potential to inform future decisions on policies and programs that affect national degree attainment that possibly may increase skilled jobs important for the nation's workforce and the economic security of employees.

## Research Design

A constructionist worldview warrants an understanding of how faculty members and administrators create meaning in their participation of CCA initiatives on their campuses (Crotty, 2010). The theoretical perspective is interpretivism, as it seeks to understand how these major institutional stakeholders understand, respond to, and interact with degree completion activities on their prospective campuses.

Data collection through 45-60 minute semi-structured interviews allowed five administrators and six faculty members from a community college to reflect on their personal experiences with CCA reform initiatives. A review of documents such as the institution's newsletters, faculty council agendas, press releases, power points, and data reports that lend to the institution's focus on the CCA objectives created a deeper understanding of campus reform efforts.

I analyzed data collected from interviews and documents through inductive content analysis. Using the software program MAXQDA allowed me to organize efficiently the multiple layers of data and a detailed search for emerging and consistent themes and meanings. The utilization of coding and memos guided me in making sense of the data (Hughes, 1994). Last, I analyzed the themes and collective meanings,

organizing the participant stories into a framework of key elements and then "restorying" them into a semi-chronological sequence.

To better understand the story of Quad-C, concepts from General Systems Theory (GST) and Social Systems Theory were applied to the data in a post hoc fashion. Individuals in these various subsystems within Quad-C participated in this study, reflecting both on their individual experiences, and on the existing and emerging institutional norms highlighted by the change process. An open social system model provided robust analytical tools to examine the institutional and human efforts required to implement degree completion strategies.

## Findings, Implications and Recommendations

While collaborating with Achieving the Dream (AtD) coaches, participants spoke about developing a data driven picture of the institution's strengths and weaknesses. Multiple course redesigns transpired in those programs where the greatest student attrition occurred, beginning with developmental math and English courses to college credit-bearing classes required for a degree. An outcome of these restructured courses was a "set curriculum" and assessment across all course sections. Meanwhile, Quad-C administrators institutionalized accountability and its dedication to increasing degrees through faculty professional development, a partnership with Complete College America, and a new strategic plan. Faculty and administrators started to see more students successfully complete their courses, a rise in persistence and retention rates, and an increase in college degrees.

The study's implication for research draws on Quad-C's mandated professional development for instructors and the installment of a set curriculum. First, research on the

effective training methods of adjunct faculty would benefit community colleges as they constitute the majority of teaching staff. Second, research on the professional development of faculty transitioning from a teacher-centered, lecture to a student-centered, active teaching would be beneficial, especially with senior level faculty in higher education. Last, research in the area of practitioner knowledge and experiences in teaching a set curriculum would be useful for other institutions deciding to follow a similar process.

The set curriculum ascribed to the three revised courses had implications for practice, too. Actions exhibited during the course reform process included three practices: making faculty as the lead developers to ensure practical knowledge, structuring clear student learning outcomes for each courses, and providing faculty training in preparation for the set curriculum. These actions aligned with the institution's drive to measure outcomes accurately, a data driven method for the institution.

Recommendations for administrators and faculty participating in the reform initiatives included increasing professional development to ensure instructors learn a variety of teach methods that create effective learning for the 21st century college student. Hiring practices that inform applicants the need to possess a wide range of teaching modalities and the use of data in making academic decisions.

## Delimitations

Through this case study, I interviewed six faculty members and five administrators on an urban community college campus located in south central United States. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), delimitations "clarify the boundaries of your study" (p.78). The intent of the study was to explore how participants understood and participated

in degree completion initiatives on their campus. This study relied on subjective information from a small group of participants. In addition, they were all Caucasian, which limited the diverse perspective of minority instructors and administrators. Due to these delimitations, the study may not be generalizable to all community colleges, instructors and administrators implementing degree completion practices.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the broad context of the globalized, knowledge-based economy that requires a skilled workforce, which has prompted political and business leaders to develop programs that increase college degrees among the nation's citizens, labeled the College Completion Agenda. However, these initiatives may be overlooking student learning outcomes and, ultimately, faculty input on effective practices to promote college degree attainment. This warrants an exploration of faculty perception related to these efforts, along with insight of the administrators who are significant in encouraging institutional collaboration and planning. Next was the purpose and significance of the study with a brief examination of the qualitative case study research design and its limitations Wrapping up the chapter was a brief discussion of the study's findings, implications, and recommendations.

The ensuing chapters will inform the reader of pertinent details to support this study. Chapter two establishes the warrant for the study of faculty and administrators opinions of reform initiatives on a community college campus. The first section will explain globalization, the knowledge economy, and its impact on workforce development and employee economic security. The second section reviews the historical and contemporary role community colleges play in workforce development. In addition, the

review will explore the community college student and faculty profile. The next section within the literature review will discuss the College Completion Agenda and its purpose to increase degree attainment across the nation. Following is a review of faculty participation in degree completion efforts. The final section explains the history and various disciplines that utilize systems theory, with a focus an open social system model in formal organizations like Quad-C. Chapter three discusses the study's methodology, including the research design, data collection, and data analysis, ethical considerations and trustworthiness. Presented in chapter four is the story of Quad-C and the themes of participant experiences and reform processes. Chapter five exhibits the analysis of the data using two theoretical lenses, General Systems Theory and Social System Theory. Chapter six contains a discussion of the study through the literature, implications, recommendations for future research and the conclusion.

# CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last 30 years, the United States has been transitioning from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy, leaving behind opportunities for nations employees to earn reasonable wages through low skilled jobs (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2004). The modern-day employee needs to possess a broad base of skills through some postsecondary credits, a career certificate, or a college degree. However, the projection is that by 2018, over 47 million jobs will be available, but United States (U.S.) employers will be unable to fill these vacancies due to the lack of skilled employees (Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University [CEW], 2013). Equally important to meeting employer demands is creating job opportunities for employees to earn a family-supporting income (American College Testing [ACT], n. d.). Political and business leaders consider community colleges to be at the forefront of higher education in teaching marketable skills to a workforce that will support the country's economy while providing a living wage for families (Russell, 2011). As a result, various college completion initiatives were developed, many focusing on the use of institutional data to support leadership and student programs (McClenney, 2013).

However, emphasis on student learning outcomes is not receiving as much attention (Rutschow et al., 2011). Consequently, faculty may not be considered as major contributors to reform initiatives (Rhoades, 2012; Rutschow et al., 2011). College reform discourse will benefit from the inclusion of the community college administrator and faculty perspective and knowledge, because institutions must provide quality degrees to be of any use to the knowledge economy and the workforce (Kolb, Kalina, & Chapman, 2013).

This literature review of relevant scholarship establishes the need for the study. The first section will explain globalization, the knowledge economy, and its impact on workforce development and employee economic security. The second section reviews the historical and contemporary role community colleges play in workforce development. In addition, the review will establish a profile of community college students and faculty. The last section will discuss the College Completion Agenda and its purpose to increase degree attainment across the nation, with an examination of faculty and administrator participation in these efforts.

## Globalization and Workforce Development

The global market is the primary financial process defining the current economy and must be understood as the broadest context within which the research problem under study here exists. Over the last 30 years, the development of innovative technologies has increased communication and enhanced transportation infrastructures, enabling greater national and international connection (Houghton & Sheehan, 2000). This globalization of markets has brought an environment of economic deregulation, which occurs through the reduction of tariffs on trade and minimalizing barriers to international investments,

reducing regulations on the marketing and production of goods and the offering of services, and thereby creating a so-called "free" market (Houghton & Sheehan, 2000, p. 7). Corporations view deregulation as an advance in production and marketing in that businesses have created a global interdependence on manufactured goods and the service sector, increasing competition and profit (Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006). A deregulated environment has created a vast domestic and international business market for U.S. businesses in that "one in three goods crosses national borders, . . . more than one-third of financial investments are international transactions", and observers expect that production may triple in the next decade (Manyika, et al., 2014, para. 2). Employers rely on employees to be knowledgeable in new developing technologies and worldwide communication skills to remain competitive in this borderless, free market.

**The Knowledge-based Economy**

Globalization has created a knowledge-based economy, in which the "production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities . . . contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence" of older technologies and activity (Powell & Snellman, 2004, p. 201). Contemporary occupations require employees to have "intellectual capabilities" which serve to support and improve each step in the manufacturing of tangible goods (Powell & Snellman, 2004, p. 201). Examples include clerical, administrative, and technical support positions using specific knowledge to maintain the workplace (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Simultaneously, employees need advanced skills to disseminate and generate knowledge to create new, innovative ideas for businesses to compete in the current market. For example, Apple manufactures goods such as iPods, iPhones and iPads, while offering

services such as iTunes and software to enhance the customer's experience (McCullough, 2012). Apple's goods and services are always changing to meet consumer needs; hence, a skilled and educated workforce must meet those demands to persevere in this knowledge-based economy.

**Workforce Development**

Employers require workers to have a wide spectrum of skills to meet the demands of innovation and the operation of services to compete in a globalized, knowledge based economy. Business organizations and non-profit employee advocacy groups determined the following skills are required for workforce readiness:

- global knowledge and language;
- critical thinking and problem solving;
- creativity and innovation;
- effective and timely communication skills in a diverse setting;
- collaboration and teamwork
- health and wellness knowledge; and
- ethical reasoning and decision making (Casner-Lotto, 2006; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014).

The expected outcome of the nation's college or university graduates is to have these advanced skills, as many of the nations' fastest growing occupations are in the healthcare system, education, financial analyst and administration areas (CEW, 2013). However, higher education may not be meeting this expectation.

## Workforce Skill Gap and Job Shortages

Businesses report that the nation's graduates are entering the workforce lacking advanced skills (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014). A reason is that the workforce has transitioned from requiring skills in manufacturing to a knowledge intensive skill base, and that graduates are not exhibiting the critical thinking and communication skills needed to work collaboratively with teams in this economy. A deeper exploration of the skills gap and higher education is outside of the scope of this study, but what is significant is that the nation's economic growth relies on employees to learn these skills through postsecondary education. An additional concern in the business field is the projected job shortage.

By 2020, the U.S. economy will have 55 million job openings (Carnavale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). The prediction is that there will be 24 million openings from newly created jobs to support a knowledge-based economy and an additional 31 million jobs due to the baby boomers retiring. The nation is reliant on a skilled and educated workforce that will support the current economy. Equally important to a skilled workforce is employees attaining degrees that will increase their future economic security.

## Employee Economic Security

Workers with a two-year or four-year degree have the potential for upward professional mobility. Employers offer additional workplace training for employees with bachelor degrees, thereby possibly increasing their salaries as they learn new and advanced skills (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). In addition, employment rates are higher for employees with a two-year and four-year degree (Lumina Foundation, 2013).

With just an associate degree, a worker can earn 73% more than a person with a high school degree (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2004). However, just possessing some college credits seems to be paying off, too.

Occupations that require some postsecondary credentials hold a significant place in the workforce. In the next six years, 65% of the jobs opening will need training after high school or some postsecondary credentials, but not four-year degrees (Lumina, 2013). These middle-skills jobs are often "found in fields such as information technology, healthcare, high-skilled manufacturing and the service industry" (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014, p. 5). These foundational skills meet requirements for 29 million jobs in America that do not require a bachelor degree and can provide employees with a living wage to support a family (CEW, 2012).

**Employees and the Living Wage**

A standard living wage supports a four-person family with basic food, health care, transportation, and housing needs (Nadeau & Glasmeir, 2015). Unfortunately, many of the nation's employees do not make a living wage. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology determined that out of 50,846,234 American households with a worker in the labor force, "19.1 million families, earned less than the living wage" (Nadeau & Glasmeir, 2015, para. 2). Despite increased corporate profitability in the knowledge economy, individual employees still struggle to earn a living wage as 75% of Americans live paycheck-to-paycheck with little savings for emergencies or medical expenses (Johnson, 2013). Some legislators are concerned with the struggles of employees and their families; however, recent efforts to raise the minimum wage for workers was rejected in the Senate in early 2014 (Lowery, 2014). A complete explanation of the living

wage movement is outside the scope of this study; the relevant point here is that it is important for American workers to have marketable skills for those jobs that will support a family. For the purpose of this study, the term *living wage* refers to the level of worker's earnings required to support a family.

The globalized, knowledge-based economy has changed the nation's workforce in that most employees are required to attain skills by accumulating some postsecondary credits or by earning a career certificate or a college degree. Business leaders predict that the future workforce may not be able to sustain a highly competitive economy because of low knowledge job shortages and that many college graduates are lacking in career ready skills. A skilled labor force is a necessity not only for America's economy and its future growth, but also for employees to have jobs that will provide a living wage to support a family.

Community colleges play an increasingly important role in educating the workforce by offering courses to students who may not otherwise attend post-secondary institutions. Political and business leaders acknowledge the importance of the community college in addressing the workforce skills gap by developing and funding degree completion initiatives. Community colleges, and particularly the administrators and faculty who work these institutions, are a vital component in workforce development efforts; exploring their perceptions of college reform efforts is a critical, yet largely overlooked, aspect of the postsecondary degree attainment campaign. The following section will explore the role and mission of U. S. community colleges. In addition, the next sections will review the community college student and faculty profile. Lasty, is an

examination of the ways community colleges are supported by national workforce development programs.

## The Role of Community Colleges in U.S. Higher Education

Established in the early 20th century, the community college is unique to the American system of higher education. Today, community colleges accredited by regional and state agencies offer certification programs, as well as grant the Associates in Sciences and/or the Associates in Arts degrees (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). Additionally, most community colleges offer academic course credits that will transfer to a four-year university. For students not seeking the academic track, community colleges offer technology training and/or provide occupational certificates. For the purpose of this study, the term *postsecondary credentials* will encompass the terms associate's degree, vocational certificate, or course transfer to a four-year university, significant factors in developing employee skills to work in a knowledge-based economy. Understanding the history of the community college and its modern day mission illuminates the institutions' important role in developing the workforce as political and business leaders push for higher degree completion and attainment rates.

### History of the Community College

At the end of the 19th century, William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, proposed that universities handle only the upper division courses, while the lower public schools provide education to students through the age of 20 (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). This new system would emulate the German higher education and secondary school systems that geared the lower division institutions to educating young adults. Following the same approach, University of California Professor Alexi

Lange and Stanford's President David Starr Jordan had the "desire to protect the integrity of the university by channeling less academically abled students into junior colleges" (Monroe, 1972, p.10). They advised that the first two years of university level courses should take place in separate institutions, away from the university. This approach to enrollment would remove those students not suited for the university, thereby providing them a vocational education and mid-level skilled job training (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). This perspective started a new way of offering higher education in the United States.

"Junior" colleges began to open across the nation starting in the early 20th century, beginning with Illinois' Joliet Junior College in 1901 (AACC, 2015a, para. 1). The institutions' purpose was to meet a community need in offering high school graduates freshman and sophomore college-level courses to those who would not otherwise have the opportunity to attend higher education because of the distance to and affordability of four-year universities. Eventually, the junior colleges started offering career programs, as it was already common to add teacher colleges or vocational programs to secondary education (AACC, 2014). The public response and need for college courses and career-oriented programs grew steadily, that by the 1950's, 600 two-year colleges were located across the nation (Garrison, 1975). The demand for career-oriented education would become even greater.

Enrollments in junior colleges increased tremendously over the next decade, beginning with the Baby Boomers entering higher education. In the 1960s, over half of the student population graduating from high school matriculated to college (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). Junior colleges accounted for 457 institutions in higher education, "more than the total in existence before that decade" (AACC, 2015f, para. 3). Junior colleges

were growing at a rate of two a year across the country. Likewise, the mission of junior colleges was evolving.

In the 1970's, the country was recovering from the Vietnam War and society looked to higher education to improve key national problems like racism, poverty, and protection of the environment through general education courses and majors (Geiger, 2005, p. 65). Simultaneously, there was a call from businesses for a more "relevant" education that aligned with vocational or professional degrees that would benefit the economy. In the beginning, these two-year institutions were called junior colleges, to signify that they only offered coursework in the first two years of a 4-year curriculum. As the two-year curriculum changed to include vocational coursework, administrators adopted the term "community college" to denote broader course offerings and an emphasis on serving the needs of the community (Cohen & Brawer, 2014).

The contemporary community college continues to offer and encourage the opportunity for a higher education and career training for all in society. These institutions share the basic mission to

- serve all segments of society through an open-access admissions policy that offers equal and fair treatment to all students,
- a comprehensive educational program,
- serve its community as a community-based institution of higher education,
- teaching,
- lifelong learning (The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2015a, para. 3).

The community colleges' signature opportunity, the open admission policy, accommodates "different types of students without turning anybody away" (Cohen & Brawer, 2014, p. 289) to earn postsecondary credentials that may increase economic opportunity and job readiness in a globalized workforce.

**Community College Student Profile**

With open admissions standards, low tuition rates, accessibility through convenient hours and multiple campuses, the nation's 1,132 public, private, or tribal community colleges have a critical role in providing postsecondary credentials to a wide range of students (AACC, 2014). Contrary to Lange and Jordan Starr's hopes to keep unprepared students out of the four-year university, "the advent of the community college as a neighborhood institution did more to open higher education to a broader population than did its policy of accepting even students who did not do well in high school" (Cohen & Brawer, 2014, p. 16). Almost half of students entering postsecondary education in America are enrolling in community colleges and enrollment increases yearly (AACC, 2012). The following are the traits that define this diverse student body and their challenges.

***Age:*** The current average age of the community college student is 28 years old, with 48% of students being 22 to 39 years old (AACC, 2015b). Thirty-seven percent of students attending community colleges are below the age of 21, many of them in high school concurrently completing college level courses. The remaining 14% of the student population is 40+ years old.

***Race/Ethnicity.*** Minority students enrolled in community colleges represent almost half of the overall undergraduate enrollment in higher education (AACC, 2014).

The Hispanic student population has risen from 19% in 2012 to 21% today, representing the largest minority student population in community colleges (AACC, 2014; The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2014). Black, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and American Indian student populations enrolled in community colleges have remained the same in the last four years: 14%, 6%, and 1% respectively. Minority students are more likely to be first generation students, low income, and in need of developmental education, in comparison to white students (Goldrick-Rab, 2010).

***Economic status.*** The majority of community college students are from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and over 61% of students attending community college work more than 30 hours a week and over half are enrolled part-time (AACC, 2014; Horn & Nevill, 2006). In addition, 20% of students care for dependents (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Students entering higher education from high school belong to families with incomes of $25,000 or lower, constituting for 44% of total enrollment in two-year schools (National Center of Education Statistics [NCES], 2010) Furthermore, 72% of community college students apply for financial aid (AACC, 2014), which is a large factor for a low-income student to persist in college. Degree completion is less likely for students who take out loans as compared to those community college students who receive grants (Ishitani, 2006), illuminating the weight of financial burden on community college students.

***Family education history***. Low-income students are usually the first person to attend college in their family and may be underprepared for the demand of college when they arrive (ACT, 2015). Furthermore, first-generation students may not have the same academic preparation or family support as other students and account for 36% of

community college enrollment (AACC, 2014). Compared to non-first generation students, first generation students have a 71% chance of dropping out of school (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

***Academic preparation.*** With the open enrollment policy and low tuition available at community colleges, academically underprepared students who may not be admissible to a 4-year university have an opportunity to go to college and increase their academic skills. Community colleges provide the majority of the nation's developmental courses; pre-entry assessments determine 72% of first-time freshman need at least one course in developmental math, English, or writing (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2012). The study reported that academically challenged students who need developmental courses are more likely to leave after the first semester and may not return.

Traditionally, research in higher education has had the tendency to bundle students into a non/traditional binary, rendering this antiquated term meaningless upon reflection of the diversity of this generation of students attending community college. In his 2010 keynote speech at Esperanza Academy Charter High School and Esperanza College, Lumina president and CEO Jamie P. Merisotis stated, "The 21st century student runs the gamut—racially, ethnically, and socially … From recent high school graduate to second-career retiree" (para. 12). The 21st century community college student is diverse in a variety of factors, from age to academic ability, and many have obligations such as family and work that can make attending college a challenge. There are many opportunities to both increase the living wage for these students and support the nation's workforce with skilled employees through a community college education. However,

these institutions experience an average attrition rate of approximately 44% from first to second year and a 27% persistence-to-degree rate (ACT, 2010; Horn & Nevill, 2006; Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Community college faculty and their role in developing the workforce is an important factor to consider in the success of these students.

**Faculty Profile**

Community college faculty members are in a challenging position within higher education, one that is somewhat different from their counterparts at four-year universities. The 21st century student arrives on campus with various situations that complicate the learning process, ranging from poor academic skills to priorities like family and jobs. Faculty are teaching students with diverse learning styles who are, at times, apathetic to learning (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). Despite these obstacles, the primary mission of the community college faculty is to teach and faculty are very dedicated to performing this task (Cohen & Brawer, 2014).

***Workload:*** The workload of a full-time community college faculty member is comparably heavier then faculty employed at four-year universities in that full-time instructors of two-year institutions typically teach five courses per semester (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). The number of students in class is lower than the university, but community college faculty spend 80 to 85% of their time on teaching activities such as advising and class preparation (Rosser & Townsend, 2006). Full-time faculty are responsible for developing student learning outcomes and assessment determined by accreditation standards (Cohen & Brawer, 2014; Rutschow, et al., 2011). Part-time faculty conduct a large portion of the class instruction in community colleges.

***Employment status:*** Contingent faculty account for 70% of the teaching staff; community college administrators find them beneficial to hire (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2010). One reason is that part-time faculty salaries are less than those of full-time faculty. Additionally, many contingent faculty are professionals in the field they are teaching, bringing additional knowledge and skills to the classroom, having a significant impact on student learning (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). Between 2003 and 2009, part-time faculty hires at community colleges increased by 10% yearly, compared to a 2% increase of full-time faculty (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2014). However, administrators may not have a commitment to contingent faculty because they are only temporary hires, resulting in poor professional development to teach the courses (Cohen & Brawer, 2014).

***Education history and ethnicity:*** Of the full-time community college faculty, 62% have master's degrees. Of the instructors teaching in vocational programs, only 31% have master's degrees (AACC, 2015d). Community college faculty are over 82% white (CCCSE, 2010), which is a sharp contrast to an enrollment that constitutes over half of the nation's minority students (AACC, 2014). These faculty members are responsible for educating a large portion of students in higher education, a task political and business leaders' support as a critical move in developing the nation's labor force.

**Community College and Workforce Development**

In 2009, President Barak Obama declared a need for increased degree attainment among citizens as a catalyst for strengthening the nation's economic future and deemed community colleges as the vehicle for this goal (Obama, 2009b). Hence, the administration introduced The American Graduation Initiative, designating $2 billion in

federal monies through student financial aid and building innovation to enhance the performance of community colleges, with the goal of increasing the nation's postsecondary degree attainment. (Schneider & Yin, 2011). Another example of decreasing the employee skills gap is through business partnerships.

Industry leaders are aware that collaborating with community colleges is a major factor in closing the skills gap in the workforce:

> Community colleges are often the obvious partners for companies seeking greater direct involvement in higher education, and their central role in workforce-relevant education is evident across industries and throughout the country. (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014, p.10)

The federal government supported community college and business collaboration by offering competitive grants through the United States Department of Labor (Fain, 2014). These grants supported workforce development by "involving [community college] partnerships with private organizations to provide specialized training" (Levin et al., 2006, p. x) through occupational certificate programs, military technologies and health profession training (AACC, 2015c). Political and business leaders recognize and support the role colleges have in developing the workforce.

Colleges have the opportunity to help students acquire skills required to work in the knowledge-based economy and to earn a living wage. The history of the community college has been to offer higher education to those unlikely to attend a four-year university, but also to support communities for career readiness. Due to high student enrollment, community colleges represent an opportunity to close a workforce skills gap through the education of thousands of 21st century students. Preparing these students to

work in a globalized labor force may provide them with a career that offers a living wage. Community college faculty have a significant role in teaching advanced skills to these students. Former President Obama and business leaders placed community colleges at the center of a plan to avoid a shortage of skilled workers and to uplift the nation's knowledge-based economy. The following section will examine how non-profit organization and business leaders created a number of college completion initiatives in order to support the nation's workforce.

## The College Completion Agenda

When former President Obama declared, "By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (Obama, 2009a, para. 66), he focused national attention on the country's low college degree completion and attainment rates. The president's speech referenced statistics showing that the country is falling behind other nations in postsecondary degree attainment. For instance, there was no increase in degree attainment among older (55-64) and younger (25-34) U. S citizen employees in 2010 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [OECD], 2011). Other nations, like Japan, Korea, and Canada, had significant increases in the younger worker category, whereas "the United States ranks behind 11 countries in the share of young workers with associate's degrees. Among 25- to 34-year olds, slightly more than 40% have associate degrees or higher, only a little higher than for their parents' generation" (AACU, n.d., p. 3, as cited by Hughes, 2013). Politicians and employers argue that the country must be back on top in degree completion and attainment rates to remain competitive in a global economy.

Low degree completion and attainment among college students have a negative impact on the nation's businesses and employees. At the current college completion rate, researchers believe the workforce will be short 55 million skilled employees by 2020, because 65% of all jobs will require at least some postsecondary education (Carnavale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Consequently, uneducated workers are trapped in low wage earning jobs that do not support a family. In contrast, those workers with a college degree may earn nearly $1 million more over a lifetime then those with a high school degree (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). That nation's employees that achieve at least some college credit may increase their likelihood of earning a substantial living wage.

Community colleges are the center of some national degree completion efforts because they enroll 45% of the nation's postsecondary students (AACC, 2014); however, they are failing to keep students enrolled. Community colleges only retain 59% of first time, full-time students the next year (Kena, et al., 2014, p. 158; Shapiro, Dundar, Yuan, Harrell, & Wakhungu, 2014). Consequently, full-time community college students are taking 3.8 years to get a 2-year degree, with part-time students taking on average five years (Complete College America, 2011). Many students are attending community colleges, but they are either taking too long or not completing a certificate or degree, as compared to their peers in four-year universities (NCES, 2015). With the nation lagging internationally in sub-baccalaureate degrees (OECD, 2011), community colleges provide an opportunity to increase degree or certificate completion, thus increasing the nation's economy with a skilled workforce.

The federal government has taken steps in meeting the needs of the workforce by supporting community colleges. President Obama's goal was to increase by 5 million

community college degrees or certificates attained by employees by 2020 (Obama, 2009a). His efforts began with the American Graduation Initiative (AGI) that provided $2 billion dollars to community colleges to create, provide, and increase workforce training (AACC, n.d. a; Obama, 2009b; Fain, May 14, 2013). The Massachusetts College system provides an example of the use of these funds. The state's 15 community colleges funded vocation specialists whom focused on student career services and redesigning program credentials to support adult students, a move Massachusetts higher education administrators praised to having a huge impact on completion rates (Fain, May 14, 2013). In addition to the AGI, the president increased Pell Grant funds and started the American Opportunity Tax Credit to give families the opportunity to save money for college (AACC, 2009).

Foundations of higher education, along with corporate and political stakeholders, have focused on college degree completion and attainment to increase the country's economic future. Viewed as a critical component of the stability of America's future workforce, the degree completion rate is defined as the percentage of college students who earn a degree within an institution, while the attainment rate is the nation's working employees who have earned a degree (Hauptman, 2012). By increasing both graduates within higher education institutions and the overall national degree attainment rates among employees, businesses may be able to fill future projected job vacancies with skilled employees (Carnavale, Smith, & Strohl , 2013, p. 1). This literature review discusses the Lumina Foundation's Achieving the Dream and Complete College America, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, both programs developed to support community colleges and the students they educate. Collectively, these crusades,

along with a multiple of others, define a national movement called the College Completion Agenda (CCA; see overview in Table 1) (Hughes, 2013).

Table 1

College Completion Agenda Initiatives

| Initiative Name | Sponsoring Organization | Additional Partner(s) | Target Group | Desired Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Access to Success | National Association of System Heads (NASH)<br>The Educational Trust | Lumina Foundation; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation | Low-income and minority students | The goal is to cut college participation and college-going gaps in half by 2015. |
| ACE Commission on Education Attainment | American Council on Education (ACE) | American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)<br>American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)<br>Association of American Universities (AAU)<br>Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)<br>National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) | All institutions of higher education | The goal is to assess the need for improved college retention and attainment and to chart a course for improvement. |
| Achieving the Dream | Lumina Foundation for Education | Over 20 funders | Community college students with emphasis on minority and low income | The goal to help students remain in school to earn a degree and/or certificate. |
| Adult College Completion Network | Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) | Lumina Foundation for Education | Adults with prior college credits | The goal is to unite and create a learning network of agencies and organizations focused on college completion for adults |

Table 1 (continued)

| Initiative Name | Sponsoring Organization | Additional Partner(s) | Target Group | Desired Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Boosting College Completion for a New Economy | Education Commission of the State (ECS) | Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation | Legislation and higher education leaders | The goal is to improve state economies by increasing the number of residents with a postsecondary credential. |
| College Completion Agenda | College Board Sponsoring | National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL),<br>Excelencia in Education<br>National Council of La Raza | 25—34 year old students | The goal is to increase the proportion of 25 to 34 year olds who hold an associate degree or higher to 55 percent by the year 2025 in order to make America the leader in educational attainment in the world. |
| College Completion Challenge | American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)<br>Association of Community College Trustees<br>Center for Community College Student Engagement<br>League for Innovation in the Community College<br>National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development<br>Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society College Board | n/a | All institutions of higher education | The goal is to promote the development and implementation of policies, practices and institutional cultures that will produce 50 percent more students with high quality degrees and certificates by 2020, while increasing access and quality. |
| College Completion Initiative College | Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) | n/a | 25-34 year old students | The goal of the effort is to increase significantly the numbers of students who complete postsecondary career certificates and associates and bachelor's degrees, so that 60 percent of each state's adults ages 25 to 64 will have one of these credentials by 2025. |

Table 1 (continued)

| Initiative Name | Sponsoring Organization | Additional Partner(s) | Target Group | Desired Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Complete College America | Carnegie Corporation of New York,<br>Lumina Foundation for Education,<br>Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation<br>W.K. Kellogg Foundation<br>Ford Foundation | A collaboration by nearly 20 national and regional higher education organizations for policy and research expertise | Underrepresented student populations | The goal of the effort is to significantly increase the number of Americans with a college degree or credential of value and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations. |
| Complete to Compete | National Governors Association (NGA) | Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation<br>Lumina Foundation for Education<br>USA Funds | State legislatures | The goals of the effort are: raise national awareness about the need to increase college completion and productivity, and the consequences of inaction; create a set of common higher education completion and productivity measures that governors can use to monitor state progress and compare performance to other states and between institutions; develop a series of best practices and a list of policy actions governors can take to achieve increased college completion; provide grants to states to design policies and programs that increase college completion and improve higher education productivity and serve as models for other states around the country; hold a learning institute for governors' senior advisors in education, workforce and economic development focusing on successful state strategies to graduate more students and meet workforce demands. |

Table 1 (continued)

| Initiative Name | Sponsoring Organization | Additional Partner(s) | Target Group | Desired Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ensuring America's Future by Increasing Latino College Completion (EAF) | Excelencia in Education | The project is a collaboration of 60 organizations, including:<br>ACT, Inc.<br>American Council on Education, College Board<br>Complete College America<br>Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities<br>Institute for Higher Education Policy<br>Jobs for the Future and National Conference of State Legislatures<br>Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation<br>Lumina Foundation for Education<br>Kresge Foundation. | Institutions | The goal of the effort is to inform, engage and sustain efforts to promote the role of Latinos in making the U.S. the world leader in college degree completion. |
| National Coalition for College Completion (NCCC) | Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) | Boys and Girls Club of America<br>Business Roundtable, Center for American Progress<br>Center for Law and Social Policy<br>National Urban League with funding partners the Ford Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. | State and Federal Legislatures | The goal of the effort is to mobilize a diverse, non-partisan voice in support of college completion that speaks for the collective interests of the American public by demanding a policy agenda that encourages higher education institutions to provide better support to underrepresented students. |
| Project Win Win | Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP). | State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO)—evaluation partner with funding partners the Lumina Foundation for Education and Kresge Foundation. | Institutions | The goal of the effort is to focus wholly on the associate degree: to match student attainment with its official recognition; to improve de facto degree completion rates at participating colleges through a retroactive award process; to improve institutional data systems, student tracking, advising, communication with students, understanding of problems in degree qualifications, and degree audit systems; to place qualified and interested students back on track to complete degrees in a relatively short time span. |

Adapted from American Association of Community Colleges (2014). National College Completion Initiatives. Retrieved from http://www.aacc.nche.edu/About/completionchallenge/Pages/national_initiatives.aspx

**Achieving the Dream**

Community college discourse has shifted from a focus on student access to student success over the last decade (McClenney, 2013). Research on increasing student learning outcomes and degree attainment through institutional effectiveness and accountability prompted the Lumina Foundation for Education to develop Achieving the Dream (McClenney, 2013), in an "effort to help more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree" (AACC, 2014, para. 4). Situated perfectly within the higher education system to fulfill the AtD mission, community colleges educate the majority of low socioeconomic status (SES) and minority students (United States Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2007), who have the lowest degree completion rate in higher education (AACC, n.d. b). The work began in 2004, when leaders from 27 community colleges with a high enrollment of minority students gathered to develop guiding principles for institutional transformation to increase college degree completion. The group prioritized "(a) committed leadership; (b) use of evidence to improve programs and services; (c) broad engagement of faculty, staff, governing boards, and community; (d) systemic institutional improvement, and (e) equity" (McClenney, 2013, p. 8). AtD leadership and data coaches worked with college teams through multiple campus visits, leadership workshops, data collection and usage seminars, and trustee trainings to identify best practices in institution transformation.

In the beginning, AtD had seven national partners who joined the Lumina Foundation to increase the student success effort, including the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas in Austin and the Bill and Melinda Gates

Foundation. Today, there are 20 partners funding AtD at 200 colleges in 34 states (McClenney, 2013). The AtD initiative marked the beginning of similar movements to promote student success in higher education through increasing degree completion

**Complete College America**

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is another major stakeholder in the College Completion Agenda, "work[ing] with educators, researchers, technologists, foundations, policymakers, and other partners to help public colleges and universities affordably and efficiently guide more low-income students to degree completion" (The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014, para. 4). The foundation has spent over $472 million since 2006 to reshape American higher education through various initiatives, scholarships, and research (Parry, Field, & Supiano, 2013). In particular, the foundation funds community college systems to streamline remedial education and degree/certificate programs so students can complete college at a faster pace than the traditional method (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). Participating programs and systems share productive ideas and programs through the foundation.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funds the Complete College America initiative with the mission, "to work with states to significantly increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations" (Complete College America, 2013, para. 1). The initiative has encouraged 12 states to use a performance-based funding model, where allocations to institutions are "based on the number of courses completed rather than attempted" (Complete College America, 2013b, para. 3). In addition, Complete College America has an alliance with 32 states to overhaul remedial education and to

conduct extensive research to pinpoint student obstacles in the classroom. The Complete College America focuses on campus and state policy change, transparent communication of research, and curriculum transformation aimed at faster degree completion.

**Critiquing the College Completion Agenda**

Researchers of higher education claim that the degree attainment targets set by these initiatives comprising the College Completion Agenda are not attainable. Considering the current rate of degree completion in community colleges, there is no way, some argue, that the goals can be met (Hauptman, 2012). In an attempt to revamp remedial education, pushing academically unprepared students through courses without adequate remedial coursework could be detrimental, especially within the poor and minority student population (Mangan, 2013). In addition, increasing enrollment to meet steep college completion goals seems a likely approach at many community colleges; however, with the expectancy that colleges do more with less money, increased enrollment may not be a feasible solution (Bailey, 2012). First, the institutions' infrastructure would have to be expanded for more students across the country. Second, seeking out additional potential students takes much funding, as well as increasing staff and instructors to teach. Lastly, AACU President Debra Humphreys (2012) warns that the Agenda's "on-time" (para. 5) focus on degree completion could possibly decrease quality teaching to meet these expectations.

Even though there is proof of increasing degree attainment, the progress is slow. The Lumina Foundation reports a 10% increase of postsecondary degrees attained by Americans between the ages of 25-64 2008 (Lumina, 2019). Initiatives are spending a vast amount of money on programs that only touch a small number of students. Broad

based, systematic change led by administrators and faculty members rather than small, single efforts may be the key to meeting the reform initiative objectives (Bailey, 2012).

**Faculty Participation in College Completion Agenda Initiatives**

During an AtD meeting titled Jobs for the Future, participants focused on community college systems creating a state and local policy making infrastructure that supported faculty involvement (Altstadt, 2012). The meeting's central theme highlighted the importance of faculty leadership in developing and sustaining initiative efforts that promoted college completion. Community college leaders identified three steps to supporting faculty involvement: 1) including faculty in research projects and policy decision making at the state level; 2) amplifying faculty professional development to increase teaching abilities that meet a wide spread of various students; and 3) creating and supporting efficient ways to use data for faculty to improve teaching practices and policy decisions (Altstadt, 2012). The discourse of faculty and degree completion activities continued on a federal level.

The U. S. Department of Education (2012) convened the Evidence-Action-Innovation College Completion Symposium to gain insight from 54 postsecondary practitioners, policy makers and researchers to identify best methods to meet President Obama's goals to increase the nation's graduation rates. Attendees of the symposium agreed institutions should support students by "intentionally implementing strategies and integrated efforts in an integrated and sustained way" (U. S. Department of Education, 2012, p.3). Participants agreed that faculty participation in institutional strategies and decision making is paramount in student success and that faculty need to be assured that completion efforts will not mean "diluting academic rigor" (U. S. Department of

Education, 2012, p. 21). Effective institutional methods identified in roundtable discussions were to incentivize faculty for efforts in teaching and attentiveness to student success, and to encourage collaboration between faculty and other offices on campus to better support student success. However, sharing information within offices may be a challenge.

A guiding principle of the AtD initiative is using institutional data to facilitate change. In a case study of one California community college, communication from administration to the faculty included only minimal information about data being collected (Baker & Sax, 2014). Further, if data was shared, it was departmental and it even varied depending on how important the topic was considered. Faculty admitted to having no idea how administration used student outcome data, substantiating poor communication among offices (Baker & Sax, 2014). Another study acknowledged that faculty utilized classroom level data more so than institutional data (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009; Rutschow et al., 2011). In addition, there was a fear that data representing poor degree completion rates would be used putatively against faculty, resulting in distrust for reform objectives (Baker & Sax, 2012; Brock et al, 2007).

Studies conducted on the first "round" of the 27 community colleges participating in the AtD revealed little faculty involvement, even though it is one of the initiative's guiding principles. A study of the first year of the initiative revealed the majority of focus was on student support services and not curriculum or classroom changes (Brock et al, 2007). Within five years, a second study exhibited that most colleges moderately utilized faculty in carrying out reform strategies and that few colleges utilized faculty for "higher level, policymaking decisions" (Rutschow et al., 2011, p. 60). Furthermore, the

evaluation showed that most colleges overlooked the role of faculty in student learning, and as a result, most did not include faculty in major decisions regarding institutional reform.

On the other hand, faculty may not be willing to participate in college reform objectives. A case study of remedial courses in 13 community colleges observed only a couple of faculty members participating with other offices to improve student outcomes (Grubb, 2010). Another qualitative study of ten English instructors in three Midwest suburban, rural, and urban community colleges revealed that the national and campus emphasis on community colleges to train the workforce "exerted pressures inconsistent with their teaching goals" (Toth, Griffiths, & Thirolf, 2013, p. 102).

There are a just a few studies examining effective practices within undergraduate institutions promoting degree completion (Jenkins, 2011). Faculty opinions are rarely considered during institutional or national reform discussions, especially regarding student success (Bradburn & Townsend, 2014; Levin, et al., 2006), even though faculty want to be involved in reform decision making (Baker & Sax, 2014). Overall, there is very little empirical research on community college faculty involved in college completion initiatives. Another important factor to consider during reform efforts are the administrative roles.

**Academic Administrators in the Completion Agenda Initiatives**

Administrators are a primary and essential support in improving student outcomes in accordance with the mission and goals of the institution (Jenkins, 2011, p. 7) while implementing and guiding national completion objectives (Brock et al, 2007; Toth, Griffiths, & Thirolf, 2013). Leaders should take caution not to omit faculty from

institutional strategic planning (Brock et al, 2007; Rutschow et al., 2011). Research will benefit from the inclusion of the community college administrator and faculty perspectives and knowledge, because institutions must provide quality degrees to be of any use to the knowledge economy and the workforce (Kolb, Kalina, & Chapman, 2013).

## Theoretical Lens

For this study, General Systems Theory (GST) and Social Systems Theory were used in a post hoc fashion as analytical tools applied to the experiences of administrators and faculty members while participating in the degree completion efforts on the Quad-C campus.

### Historical Development of (Social) Systems Theories

By the 1950s, discussions of systems began to appear in various disciplines. Life scientist Ludwig von Bertalanffy had recognized the power of GST as a common conceptual framework, useful for analyzing multifaceted organizations across a variety of different disciplines (Buckley, 1967). Significant to the present study, Bertalanffy (1968) posited a system as reliant on its surrounding environment to continue its functioning. Social scientists had focused on human interaction within a social system (Parsons, 1951). Later, organizational studies thinkers used the open social system models to examine the reliance of a dynamic social system to remain stable and alive (Andes, 1970).

**Life Sciences.** After War World II, scientists from fields such as physics, biology, sociology, and psychology developed system models. The term came from an ancient Greek word *synistanai* meaning, "to put together" (Carr, 1955, p. 167). A system connoted many interdependent parts organized to operate as a single whole. Ludwig von

Bertalanffy, an Austrian biologist, developed the first concept of system theory in the 1930s, and eventually published his thinking on the topic three decades later (Bertalanffy, 1968). Early on, life scientists conceived of systems as closed, or "isolated from their environment" (p. 39). These systems contained mechanistic, rational purpose-driven activities within non-permeable borders or boundaries. This idea implied the environment, elements external to the system, had no impact on internal operations (Bertalanffy, 1968).

Bertalanffy (1968) defined an alternate perspective in that "every living organism is essentially an open system. It maintains itself in continuous inflow and outflow, a building up and breaking down of components… so long as it is alive" (p. 39). The organism and its surrounding environment relied on this reciprocal relationship for their survival. Researchers in other disciplines pursued similar ideas, drawing conclusions about human relationships and thereby pioneering new approaches to system theory (Bertalanffy, 1968, p. 38).

**Social Science Perspectives.** Working independently of the life scientists, renowned sociologist Talcott Parsons (1951) developed Social Systems Theory (SST). Parsons defined SST as an action theory in that:

> A social system consists in a plurality of individual actors inter*acting* with each other in a situation, which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the optimization of gratification and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols. (emphasis in original; p.5)

A social system is, in other words, an array of networks made up of individuals, groups, and/or institutions, interacting through activities and sentiments as a coherent whole with a significant purpose. According to Parsons, these human networks were bound together through organizationally- or culturally-defined elements. Parsons perceived this interaction as a scientific process worthy of theoretical analysis applied to other systems in a variety of disciplines. Scholars today agree that GST did indeed have an impact on the development of SST, even though Parsons denied being a general system theorist and did not cite Bertalanffy's work (White, Klein, & Martin, 2015).

**Organizational studies.** Beginning in the early 1960s, scholars studying the culture and behavior of business organizations began shifting from a closed system perspective to the open-systems perspective specifically seeking to understand how the environment affected system operations (Parsons, 1951; Morgan, 2006). By applying systems to business organizational management, system operators or researchers could better understand the interactions and key patterns between subsystems. Managers could then make changes within the subsystems or the overall organizational structure in order to increase the usefulness of its outputs into the environment. For example, management personnel could hypothesize a potential downsizing in the number of factory workers in response to the marketing department's failure to promote an organization's services adequately. The open-systems perspective defined an organization as a living system containing multifaceted human variables influenced by the environment.

## Social Systems in Education

By the late 1960s, Getzels and other authors analyzed the administration process within public schools by applying concepts of social system theory to observe human

behavior within an organization. Later, Banathy (1973) trained public education administrators to view the school as a social system that relied on its surrounding environment to maintain its purpose and remain significant.

Getzels and Guba (1957) applied concepts from Parson's SST to analyze the role of K-12 education administration. Later, Getzels, Lipham, and Campbell (1968) wrote *Educational Administration as a Social Process,* expounding on the practice of administration through a review of research. Getzels et al. explained that social system theory could analyze any level of a system, regardless of the system's size. To analyze the administrative process within a classroom, school, or community, Getzels, et al. (1968) conceived social systems as "Two classes of phenomena, which are at once conceptually independent and phenomenally interactive" (p. 56). The first class of phenomena is referring to the "normative" or social dimension of activity within the "institution [defined by] certain roles and expectations that will fulfill the goals of the system" (p. 56). The second class focuses on the personal or psychological dimension of activity, a reflection of "individuals with certain personalities and needs-dispositions" of the human actors working in the (sub)system (p. 56). The observed interactions between these two classes comprise "social behavior" (p. 56). To understand how formal organizations, such as a school, functioned internally to complete its goals, one must observe the behavior of the human networks functioning between these "socio-psychological" elements (Getzels & Guba, 1957, p. 423). Getzels et al. (1968) argued that job satisfaction and system efficacy increased when the employee's personal values and beliefs are congruent to the organization's values and expectations. Social system

concepts appeared in common education models relative to the organization's reliance on its environment.

Banathy (1973) borrowed upon social systems concepts and principles to develop a systems-environment model focused on the relationship between educational organizations and the environment in which they existed. The author saw the environment as a "larger system that surrounds the system under consideration," called the "suprasystem" (p. 7). Relative to the present study, colleges and universities belonged to an educational suprasystem within the state and nation that support higher education through resources, finances, and other functional needs. To meet the demands of the suprasystem, the open system received input from the environment such as people, tangible materials, data, money or tangible resources like computers, paper and smartboards. The system transformed the inputs to outputs and returned them back to the environment to meet its expectations and demands. The systems-environment model offered a conceptual framework to examine the schools' ability to adjust to the changing needs and demands of society.

Hoy and Miskel (1996) both had experiences in K-12 teaching and administration before becoming scholars of common education and administration. Drawing from Parsons (1960) and Getzels et al. (1968), these professors of education identified the K-12 school as a formal organization as human actors "explicitly established to achieve certain goals", or to provide a K-12 education (Hoy and Miskel, 1996, p. 25). As such, a school as a formal organization is an open social system reliant on its environment for survival. Hoy and Miskel (1996) contextualized schools and administrative practices through an open social system framework that addressed both institutional and individual

elements important to completing the institutions' mission. The school social system consisted of interdependent parts that "contribute to and receive from the whole" (p. 24). In other words, when there is a demand for new courses from an outside entity, the principal, teachers, and students are affected by the request. Hoy and Miskel (1996) described schools as social systems as "peopled". Teachers and students act based on their needs, beliefs, and motivations. The human actors within the school functioned within the normative rules established by the system. The authors identified four major elements, or subsystems, that influenced behavior in a formal organization: structural, political, individual, and cultural. These elements, along with Hoy and Miskel's social system model, are delineated in chapter five.

**Conceptualizing Higher Education as an Open Social System**

Andes (1970) followed suit in using the concepts of social system theory to frame a review of relevant higher education literature. The foundational scholarship in HIED – as a field of study, rather than a unique discipline – commonly drew on previous work by scholars of common education as well as business/organizations.

Andes (1970) reviewed several studies on university administration practice published in the late 1960s, and found most administrators focused on a "closed state" of system practice focused on "organizational tables, rationality and efficiency" of the institutions' formal structure (p. 22). He saw very little connection between the organizational patterns posited by theorists and the complex relationships observed or described among human actors in university settings, or the way these actors functioned collectively to meet the system's goals. Andes (1970) called for a conceptual, simple framework to analyze universities as organizations that consider the goals of the faculty,

staff, and students, while not ignoring the institutional and department objectives. Parsons' definition that a "social system consists in a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation" (Parsons, 1950, p. 5), Andes used it to frame the university as a social system in two different ways. First by examining the interaction between the environment and the institution. The second framework involved the interaction taking place internally between the multiple sub-systems of actors.

Birnbaum (1989), author of one of the first masterpieces related to organizational behavior in higher education- *How Colleges Work,* saw the institutions as "interrelated system[s]" of ideas and people in various roles all working toward a common goal of creating graduates, service or research (p. xiv). He wrote the book as a tool to inform administrators of ways to develop a broader and in-depth view of the college or university structure, and the functions operated by individuals and groups within. Birnbaum (1989) viewed colleges as open social systems and purported that to understand the interactions between the internal subsystems, one must know "how they're connected or coupled" (p. 35) to one another.

Hoy and Miskel's open social systems model provided the theoretical framework to assess study abroad programs through the input—process—output method at U.S. research universities (Yao, 2009). The study measured institutions' commitment to supporting study abroad programs through the input of human and financial resources provided. Establishing and coordinating these programs relied heavily on faculty participation from a variety of academic disciplines. Faculty motivation in the process would increase student involvement and their "international competency, and should enhance institutions' capacity to gain global competitiveness in the 21st century" (p. 8).

The open social systems model analyzes critical elements vital to the organization's function and effectiveness.

Bertalanffy defined and popularized the concepts of systems theory that could be applicable across a variety of sciences. Specifically, he determined a system relied on its environment to remain alive, a principle later carried over into organizational studies in business structure. Parsons defined social systems as the interaction of people working collectively within a large, goal-driven entity. Researchers of education applied these system concepts to explore both institutional and individual behaviors in education settings. Getzels et al. (1968) determined that effective administration within a school system relied on understanding how the psychological needs and values of the members assimilate with the normative or social roles and expectations of the school. The authors' determined that the closer these two factors aligned, efficiency and employee satisfaction increased. Banathy conceptualized a school as a social system adapting to the needs of the suprasystem through external feedback on the state of its outputs. Scholars Hoy and Miskel (1996) made explicit the school as a social system model as a way to identify behavior within the organization and how it adjusts to its environment. Scholars in higher education gleaned many assumptions from the common education discipline and applied them to universities and colleges.

## Chapter Summary

This literature review first examined the nation's workforce development situated within a globalized, knowledge economy, while exploring the employee skills gap, projected job shortage and efforts to create more jobs that support a living wage. Former President Obama and business leaders promoted community colleges as a vehicle to

increasing the nation's degrees to maintain a knowledge-based workforce. Historically, community colleges have exhibited a dedication to making higher education a possibility for students who would otherwise not attend a four-year university. In addition, the unique focus of supporting communities by preparing citizens for careers proved that community colleges are a vital component for the nation's workforce. The Complete College Agenda is a collection of national initiatives developed by non-governmental organizations and charitable foundations that encourage institutions to use student progress data to design programs and policies that improve degree production. Achieving the Dream and Complete College America are such efforts that focus on increasing postsecondary credentials among community college students to increase skilled employees. With both foundations stressing faculty involvement and streamlining education curriculum, the literature regarding these initiatives does not feature as prominently faculty involvement. Much of the work for preparing students to complete a degree falls on the faculty from whom they are learning the skills necessary for success in the global, knowledge-based workforce. However, faculty may not be included in major reform approaches or are simply avoiding involvement in the efforts. To increase the success of these initiatives, administrators must purposefully implement system wide strategies and integrate all institutional stakeholders in the process. An open social system theory guides a theoretical framework encompassing an analysis of the institution's structure and the human interrelationships within the system. Exploring how faculty members and administrators understand and experience reform initiatives on their campuses will add to the existing literature and may enhance future attainment practices

for other community colleges. Next, chapter three will explain the study's methodology and analysis.

# CHAPTER III

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides the research design to understand the relationship between faculty and the administrators who oversee college completion initiatives. A qualitative approach was used to pursue what it means to community college administrators and faculty to have a degree completion initiative on their campus. This chapter discusses the research study design, including the theoretical perspective, methodology, data analysis, ethical consideration, trustworthiness, and the study's limitations.

### Research Questions

How are Complete College America initiatives implemented on a community college campus?

a. What is the faculty experience of the process of implementing the CCA agenda?

b. What is the administrators' experience of the process of implementing the CCA agenda?

## Overview of the Design for the Study

This case study is "bounded" by consisting of a single urban community college in south central United States. It explored faculty and administrators' perceptions of Complete College American (CCA) reform interventions on their campus, as a phenomenon common across a case "operating in real situations" (Stake, 2006, p. 30), focusing on the process of participants' meaning making, or "to know personally the activity and experience of the case" (Stake,2006, p. 3). As a case study has the ability to unearth richer data and insight, this study revealed faculty and administrator participation in degree attainment activities among multiple settings. Thus, it provided a clear understanding of the phenomenon.

This case study was grounded in a constructionist epistemology. This epistemological position posits that interaction and discourse are the vehicles through knowledge of self and the world are articulated, understood and shaped (Patton, 2002). Knowledge is determined collectively and is the basis for meaning and reality. Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain further:

> Concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and/or lives, to both the researcher and themselves. Out of these multiple constructions, analysts construct something that they call knowledge. (p. 10)

A constructionist worldview guided my understanding of how faculty members and administrators created meaning of the CCA initiatives on their campus. I focused on human behavior and the socially constructed meanings of the environment.

Interview questions prompted participants to explore the "context-specific perspective" of their experiences and participation in degree attainment efforts on their campus (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 9). The inclusion of both administrator and faculty experiences supported a rich empirical dataset relevant to ongoing national conversation about reconciling emphasis on graduation statistics and learning outcomes in the evaluation of college completion initiatives. Rich information was discovered about the lived experience of participants who contributed to degree completion efforts prompted by a national College Completion Agenda.

**Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical perspective informs a study's methodology and guides the interpretation of the data (Crotty, 2010). For this study, interpretivism directs my understanding of the experiences of faculty members participating in CCA initiatives. Interpretivism is rooted in the sociology of Max Weber who believed that the human/social sciences are concerned with the *Verstehen,* or understanding of social phenomena (Crotty, 2010). Interpretivism seeks to understand humans in the context of how they act and interact within society.

Constructionism and Interpretivism complement one another as they place emphasis on a socially constructed world experienced by others (Schwandt, 1994). To capture the unique and individual perspectives of faculty members and administrators, I listened to their words and to how they constructed meanings related to their experiences with degree attainment initiatives on their campuses.

## Methods

To establish a case study, it is necessary to explore the diversity the institution brings to the study and the various opportunities the case offers to learn about the complexities of the campus community (Stake, 2006). I explored Quad-C's diverse contexts, interviewing various faculty members and administrators to gather data of reform activities in various circumstances and perspectives. Using open-ended question and semi-structured interviews, I explored the participants' perspective of the atmosphere and culture of Quad-C. In addition, I searched through campus research, faculty council notes, the campus website, and a grant proposal identifying key aspects to the reform activities. Together, the participants' experiences and reform related documents allowed me to draw out the intricate and multiple layers of meaning important to the study of degree attainments efforts on Quad-C.

### Study Site

Capital City Community College (Quad-C) is located in an urban area in south central United States. It is a public two-year institution, is the fourth largest community college in the state, and enrolls approximately 24,000 students per year. The college's mission statement reiterates the institution's goal to increasing degrees in the community and has a goal of increasing the number of students attaining a degree or certificate by 50 percent. Quad-C collaborated with the AtD foundation in 2007 to create systematic reform that would increase degree completion. Continuing this partnership, the college joined forces with Complete College America in 2012. Two years later, in 2014, Quad-C was named an Achieving the Dream Leader College, a national designation awarded to community colleges that created systematic reform in order "to improve student success

and closing achievement gaps" (Achieving the Dream, 2014). All interviewees had knowledge and experience with the degree completion efforts in Quad-C.

**Sample**

For this study, a purposive, criterion sampling strategy yielded "information-rich" insights into the perspectives of Quad-C faculty and administrators (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 69). Criterion sampling strategy coincides well with case studies, as participants must meet certain criteria that contributes to the context of the case (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2006).

To achieve a diverse breadth of reform knowledge, I interviewed the directors of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, professional development, two department chairs, and six full-time faculty members on campus. With many institutions focusing on math and writing to increase student completion (Bailey, 2012), the majority of the participants had a role in the developmental math and English course redesigns. Some participants volunteered information regarding their professional backgrounds and prior teaching experience that may have provided diverse perspectives on reform initiatives and teaching (see Table 2). For instance, many of the math faculty and an administrator were previous K-12 instructors and drew on that experience as they participated in the course redesigns. However, the other participants had different professional backgrounds, such as business organization and law. As a group, participants' career in higher education ranged from 6-28 years, meeting the research study's requirement of a minimum of three years teaching experience or involvement in reform initiatives on their campus (see Table 2).

Given that I used criterion sampling, the participants in this study, as a group, are only as demographically diverse as Quad-C's hiring decisions over more than two decades. I was not able to achieve a balance of participant race and gender and thereby a demographically diverse perspective. The participants were all Caucasian, similar to the national average for administrators and faculty (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The scholarly literature on the college completion agenda pays very little attention to faculty characteristics as they relate to the success of students, so I did not include faculty background in the interview protocol. The findings of this study suggest that future researchers may want to be more intentional about collecting this information from faculty involved in curriculum reform efforts, and particularly those related to college completion goals.

Table 2. Participant Demographics

| **Participant Roles** | **Name*** | **Age** | **Time in Higher Education** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional Administration and Division Deans | Iris | 46-55 | 6.5 years |
| | Paul | 56 & over | 10 years |
| | Lacy | 56 & over | 11 years at Quad-C; Total 30 years in Higher Education |
| | Ohio | 46-55 | 11+years |
| | Mariah | 56 & Over | 10 Years |
| Faculty | Kate | 56 & over | 20 years |
| | Lena | 46-55 | 10 years at Quad-C, Total 22 years in Higher Education |
| | Ethan | 46-55 | 20 years |
| | Carmen | 36-45 | FT 5.5 years and PT 7 years at Quad-C |
| | Olivia | 56 and over | 28 years |
| | Nova | 56 and over | 17 years |

* Participants were assigned, and in some cases chose their own, pseudonyms.

## Data Collection

In my research to understand the lived experiences of faculty and administrators while implementing degree completion initiatives on a community college, I recorded 11 participant interviews at various times over the course of five months during the spring 2016 semester. I transcribed each interview within 24 hours of meeting with the participant. Using member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I provided each participant a copy of the complete transcript and an opportunity to make corrections, clarifications and for additional thoughts. Two members responded with corrections, which I immediately corrected to their specifications.

Multiple participant interviews complement a case study as they "explain and describe complex interactions and processes" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 195). A preliminary list of 11 open-ended questions provided a guide for 45-60 minute semi-structured interviews. The questions were designed to encourage participant reflection on their experiences of CCA reform initiatives on campus (see interview guides, Appendix A-C). Interviewing participants with varying roles within the campus provided different perspectives as to how they engaged in the college's CCA initiatives.

After recording and transcribing the interviews, they were stored in an electronic file on a password-protected computer. The use of denaturalized transcription means a "verbatim depiction of speech… [that focuses on] the meanings and perceptions created and shared" between the participant and researcher (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005, p. 4) and coincides well with this qualitative case study grounded in constructionism.

Documents are a type of artifact. Documents are used to "understand culture – or the process and the array of objects, symbols, and meanings that make up social reality

shared by members of a society" (Altheide, 1996, p. 2). The *society,* in this case, was the campus community of the particular institution. Chosen for the descriptions of the case/campus site and initiative activities, the documents centered on faculty and administrative participation, student learning outcomes and effective reform practices (see Document Summary Form in Appendix D). I located and collected campus studies, faculty council notes, AtD reports, press releases, and a grant proposal related to the institutions' focus on degree completion efforts since becoming AtD schools in 2007.

## Data Analysis

A case record containing all of the "major information that will be used in doing the final data analysis and writing the case study" (Patton, 2002, p. 449) was maintained in a manageable and password protected electronic file. A case record for the college contained the following:

- electronic transcripts of each participant interview;
- participant demographic sheet containing information such as gender, race, years teaching, roles and responsibilities at the college, and degree credentials; and
- documents, each with an attached summary form that aides the researcher in gleaning information from documents (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 101).

Once all of the data were collected, I began an analysis of the documents using content analysis. Patton (2002) defined content analysis, as the process of "qualitative data reduction and sense making effort[s] that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (p. 453). I began by manual coding

each interview with words significant to the main research question: "*How are Complete College America initiatives implemented on a community college campus?"* Once I completed all 11 transcriptions, I manually coded a second time, "linking" words and phrases that emerged from participant interviews (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9). Upon completion of manual coding, I utilized coding software MAXQDA for a third round of analysis, "to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or 'families' because they share the same characteristic," denoting the patterns, or using Saldaña's term, the "regularity" of codes in the transcripts and documents (p. 9).

Following the interview transcriptions, I reviewed over 25 documents, again, searching for data, words, or phrases connected to the research question. Insights into the campus culture and "environmental factors and issues that impact participants' perceptions about this context" was a goal of analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 108). Document words and phrases where uploaded into MAXQDA and organized in categorical families and content related data.

Next, I organized the codes into categories and four themes emerged that marked the process of the reform. They were chronological, so it made sense to display the data as a narrative of the process. I "collected the description of events or happenings [related to degree completion efforts at Quad-C], and then configured them into a story" (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). This process entailed my organization of the participant stories into a framework of key elements and then "restorying" them into a chronological sequence. Saldaña (2016) explains the "write up required rich descriptive detail" of the phenomena, with "an emphasis on how participant[s]' transformation progresses through time" (p. 157). The participants' own words were woven into the description, exhibiting

to the reader the significant meanings that administrators and faculty attach to the CCA efforts on their campus and to ensure the story is accurately represented (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Through the interpretation or restorying of the findings, the reader is presented with how faculty and administrators make meaning of the CCA initiative on their campus. Furthermore, I applied General Systems Theory and Social Systems Theory in ad hoc fashion to better understand the story of Quad-C.

## Ethical Considerations

I observed many ethical considerations starting with protecting the anonymity of the participants in the study. A pseudonym was assigned to identify each participant throughout the data collection, the analysis, and the restory of the presentation of findings to ensure privacy. Second, I obtained approval from the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting any research. Third, each participant signed an informed consent form before the start of the interview. I provided them with a copy of the form. Participants completed a demographics face page requesting such information as gender, race, years teaching, roles and responsibilities at the college, and degree credentials. This information was generic and de-identified for the study. I stored these two forms separately in a locked file in my home. Last, to protect the confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants, the transcription of the interviews, along with the digital recorder, were locked in a drawer in my home office and transcripts and audio recordings will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

## Trustworthiness

Setting standards of credibility and dependability are a critical focus in producing an accurate, qualitative study. Credibility ensures that "the researcher accurately represented what the participants think, feel, and do" (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p. 77). To maximize credibility I utilized three methods: member checking, triangulation, and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1998).

Soon after the interviews were transcribed, I provided each participant a copy of the complete transcript and an opportunity to make corrections, clarifications and additional thoughts. Two members responded with corrections, in which I immediately corrected to their specifications. This "member check" eliminated researcher bias (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 77), which occurs when the researcher exhibits prejudice or selectivity toward the data resulting in a skewed study outcome.

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomena (Patton, 2002). Four sets of data were collected in this study to ensure triangulation and to strengthen the credibility of the study using two data collection methods: interviews with full-time faculty members, department chairs, institution administrators, which reflect three different data sources, as well as college-related documents, and demographic surveys.

Reflexivity involves a commitment to attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process. The researcher must remain balanced while "understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness" (Patton, 2002, p. 495). I made journal

entries throughout the analysis and write up of the data. Reflexivity requires the qualitative researcher to "position themselves within the research" and to recognize, reflect on, and control personal reactions and bias toward the participant or the data collected (Berger, 2015, p. 9).

At the time that I was to defend my dissertation proposal, in 2015, I wrote, "I believe that as a member of faculty, the students I teach must be qualified for the job as a social worker and that I am not so much focused on raising of the number of degrees attained." I now believe that faculty have a responsibility to evaluate their teaching methods and adopt new ones that will benefit their students' academic growth, not only in the classroom, but as they continue on to graduation. However, some of my colleagues and the study's participants would not agree with me. I have remained diligent to maintaining an unbiased approach when describing the participants' perception of the issue through personal journaling.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) define dependability "whether one can track the process and procedures used to collect and interpret the data" (p. 78). Previously, I provided a detailed description of the research process. I also offer the reader the opportunity to view the raw data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). In addition, I asked two colleagues to read the representation of the administrator and faculty stories to identify any bias in the research.

## Limitations

The limitations of this study include "the localized nature of the research," therefore making "it difficult to generalize findings across institutions and states or to assume the transferability of findings in the case of qualitative research" (Twombly &

Townsend, 2008, p. 5). Participants' professional employment background before coming to Quad-C also limits generalization, given that the unique combination of particular professional background and specific previous experiences as educators in various settings is likely impossible to replicate beyond this study site. The intention of the study was to be generalizable to all community college campuses; rather, by providing a rich and detailed story of successful degree completion initiatives on a community college campus, through the experiences of the administrators and faculty members, this study may become a resource to other community college who employ part-time and full-time instructors with a variety of backgrounds and teaching experience, implementing similar approaches.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the purpose of the study of discovering and describing faculty and administrator experiences with CCA reform initiatives through a case study methodology. This case study reflects a constructionist epistemology and an interpretivist theoretical perspective that are used to understand the multiple meanings of the participants' experiences. I have analyzed the participants stories related to their experiences in supporting degree completion efforts and combined them in order to create a restory of phenomena, detailed in a clear and systematic fashion that supports the study's purpose. Ethical considerations, such as participant confidentiality and IRB approval are important considerations in conducting research with human subjects. The credibility and dependability of the study are increased through member checking, triangulation of the data, and researcher reflexivity. This case study is not meant to be generalizable to all community colleges and CCA initiatives across the U.S. The study is,

however, a source of ideas to consider for community colleges who might consider similar campus initiatives.

# CHAPTER IV

## FINDINGS

On a sunny day in June 2016, campus faculty and staff gathered in the atrium to celebrate Quad-C's recognition as an Achieving the Dream (AtD) Leader College, an accomplishment awarded by the Lumina Foundation to colleges that displayed effective efforts to increase student success and graduation rates through institutional policy reform and practice. At the refreshment table, two faculty members, one from the math department and the other from the English department, discussed what they had experienced over the last eight years since Quad-C joined with AtD. They recalled the "painful" campus-wide presentation of decreasing student success rates within the English and math departments. Prior to these discussions, the math faculty was well aware of the poor statistics and recalled the department dean warning, "Something has to change before someone makes us change," and that resonated with the faculty. They developed and implemented a total redesign of the developmental math courses. The English instructor, on the other hand, recalled mixed messages from administrators: "We need to get our numbers up; don't change what you are doing." The English faculty members soon discovered through a campus-wide announcement that the Composition I

For faculty members, the course redesigns were the primary initiatives to increase student success and degrees, but each department had a different experience along the way.

## Context of the Study

In an effort to support the nation's workforce and economy, community colleges are implementing degree completion strategies aimed at increasing the number of skilled and educated employees. This chapter opened with a composite portrait of the existing dynamics based on data from this study of the experiences of math and English faculty on an urban community college campus in south central United States. The faculty in these two departments participated in a strenuous redesign of their developmental and/or first college-level courses that focused on increasing student-learning outcomes and decreasing course withdrawal rates, with the intention of supporting the institution's goal to increase overall graduation rates.

Due to a nationwide push by business and political leaders to produce an educated workforce, community colleges have become the center of degree attainment initiatives across the nation, collectively known as the College Completion Agenda (CCA). The purpose of this case study was to explore the experiences of faculty and administrators involved in college degree attainment initiatives, such as the redesign of courses intended to increase student success within the classroom. The study was guided by a single research question, with two sub- questions:

- How are Complete College America initiatives implemented on a community college campus?
    - What is the faculty experience of the process of implementing the CCA agenda?
    - What is the administrators' experience of the process of implementing the CCA agenda?

The following five themes and six sub-themes revealed both the processes and possibilities for future reform initiatives.

- "Data Driven Picture"
- Course Redesigns
    - Developmental Math Course Redesign
    - Developmental English Redesign
    - English Composition I Redesign
- "Set Curriculum"
- Institutional Accountability
    - Professional Development
    - New Partnership
    - New Strategic Plan
- Successful Outcomes

These themes figured prominently in the data. The significance of each is most clearly seen in the unfolding of the reform process. Thus, I have chosen to display the data in the form of a narrative that describes Quad-C's implementation of degree completion

initiatives as told through the participants' stories of this experience in a semi-chronological order.

## The Journey of Quad-C to Increase Degree Completion

Since its beginning, Quad-C has exhibited a rich history of innovation in student learning. To reverse a trend of increasing student withdrawals and decreasing success rates in the college, Quad-C administrators partnered with Achieving the Dream (AtD), a Lumina Foundation for Education initiative. Collaborative work between AtD leaders and teams of faculty guided some instructors to gain a new perspective related to making evidence-based decisions on student learning and curriculum design. Multiple course redesigns transpired in those programs where the greatest student attrition occurred, beginning with developmental math and English courses to college credit-bearing classes required for a degree. An outcome of these restructured courses was a consistent curriculum. Quad-C institutionalized its dedication to increasing degrees through faculty professional development, a partnership with Complete College America and a strategic plan. Faculty and administrators started to see more students successfully complete their courses, a rise in higher persistence and retention rates, and an increase in college degrees.

In the 1970s, the citizens of Capital City saw a need for higher education and voted for a tax that would support the development of Quad-C. The new community college was neither accredited nor part of the state college system. Ethan, a faculty member, explained the college did not have to follow rules from the state regents. Nova started teaching at Quad-C during this time, and she reminisced those instructors and

administrators were “encouraged to think out of the box and do things differently.” They had a blank slate on which to create a new style of learning in higher education.

Ohio, an administrator, explained that these early pioneers “looked at educational research at the time and they built a true mastery learning college.” Using this knowledge, faculty members carefully designed a set of learning objectives for each course in the college. Upon completing a course, students would receive scores such as M for mastery or an MH, mastery with honors. Students could retake a course as many times as they needed to master the objectives. Quad-C was producing knowledgeable students, but where could the graduates then go? State schools would not take an M grade when a student wanted to transfer. Ohio proclaimed this mastery learning college was a “hippie school” because it did not fit into the state’s higher education model. Eventually, the college joined the state’s higher education system and transitioned to a traditional grading model.

Paul, an institutional administrator, elucidated that since Quad-C opened its doors in the early 1970s it “has been committed to student success.” In the mid-2000s, developmental courses had greater failure rates than credit-bearing courses, with almost half the students in developmental math and English failing or withdrawing. In addition, the graduation rates were very low, as was the case in other community colleges across the nation. A former president urged the college to increase efforts in student success, as “he knew our most significant problem at that time was not attracting students, but graduating them” (Paul). As a response to the president’s plea, Quad-C partnered with the Achieving the Dream team at the Lumina Foundation in 2007.

**Theme 1: Gaining a New Perspective through a "Data Driven Picture"**

A guiding principle for Achieving the Dream is for colleges to promote the use of institutional data to facilitate change through the broad engagement of faculty, staff, governing boards, and the community. The AtD coaches led cross-divisional groups to participate in strategic planning for the institution. Nova, faculty, described how the collaboration between the departments "felt like we were being heard when we came up with all these long lists of things that would help. Departments were working together. I can remember the English people sitting in with the math faculty and talking." She felt the AtD workshops and meetings emphasized, "Bringing different departments together and making them work together is valuable." She recalled discovering services on campus that would benefit her students, such as free counseling. This cross-divisional collaboration made a huge impact on her through the discovery of resources and the opportunity to brainstorm ideas for student success with other departments on campus.

Whereas the sessions and workshops increased collaboration among faculty and staff, discussion focused on the importance of using data. Ohio, one of the department-level administrators, emphasized that AtD representatives "would like for success rates to go up, but really what they're after is 'please take a look at what's really going on at your school'… try to get a data-driven picture of what's really happening." Through campus-wide leadership meetings, cross-divisional workshops, and listening sessions, AtD representatives taught faculty and staff how to use data from institutional and program assessments to make informed decisions.

To create a data-driven picture of student success within the institution, administrators started compiling and consistently sharing institutional data through mass

emails, divisional and campus-wide meetings, and the college website. Administrator Paul asserted that communicating information to everybody on campus is "always hard. I wish more and more people knew it. The people involved know it implicitly, but keeping the word out, making sure everybody understands" is a challenge. Another administrator, Mariah, reiterated, "Unless you're really working with the information, I think it's hard to ingrain it into your behaviors." Both participants agreed the institution was "still growing on how we really disseminate that information to more people." They felt that involving more people in degree achievement initiatives would increase the need to make evidence-informed decisions.

However, some faculty experienced uneasiness when reviewing the data. Ethan, an instructor, explained the AtD representatives "came through campus to do workshops and talk about assessment, data collection and what that meant – what the school was doing well, what it wasn't" and remembers most of these initial discussions were negative. Paul, an administrator recalled that "accepting responsibility for the data, and having open, transparent, candid conversation[s]" was difficult for some faculty and staff. He described the first institution-wide presentation of departmental and institutional statistics as a "data death march." Faculty member Olivia explained they felt "put down" during this process. Initially, faculty struggled with what was going on within their own departments.

Although the sessions created the opportunity "to investigate things ourselves and offer solutions," Ethan remembered some of his teaching colleagues had a different experience. He shared that some faculty responded with solutions that focused on "how do we get the students to be better" in the classroom but were hesitant to look within the

department for ways that "structurally we're doing that are either hindering our students or that could help our students." Because – as he put it – "everyone has their favorite topics," some faculty struggled with examining the curriculum that hindered their students' success in the classroom. Ethan's frustrations seemed to center on his colleagues' reluctance to take responsibility for their role, or that of the curriculum they had designed, in the success of their students.

**Theme 2: Course Redesigns**

Quad-C administrators, faculty and staff implemented a number of initiatives following the AtD workshops and sessions. The common theme among all eleven participants was the development and implementation of three major course redesigns: developmental math and English, and the English Composition I courses. These redesigns proved to produce significant results in the classroom and for the institution.

**Sub-theme 1: Developmental math.** Administrator Paul explained that Quad-C's "first, big signature initiative" since partnering with AtD was the faculty-driven redesign of the developmental math program. Another administrator, Ohio, reiterated that the faculty knew "everybody in the country is looking at the low success rates in mathematics." In addition, the region's career opportunities required that employees possess skills grounded in a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) foundation. Ohio felt that it would not be long before Quad-C higher administration or the state regents would "impose something" on the department to increase student classroom success. Katie declared that the Quad-C math faculty "are different from other departments… [and they] don't just sit back." Ohio confirmed in that "being math people, we looked at all the data...and found the numbers to be unacceptable." In the fall

of 2008, they started to design “a plan of how we were going to change the developmental [curriculum], and [to keep in] within our own department in making those decisions.” After years of testing new ways to teach developmental math, faculty members were ready to attempt alternative methods to increase student success in the classroom.

Once the math faculty decided to totally rewrite the classic three-level developmental math system (i.e., basic math, elementary algebra, and high school Algebra I), they developed a committee of both administrators and faculty. Katie remembered that initially the committee met to discuss “what objectives we wanted in each [sequence].” Identifying and implementing course objectives was a critical component because faculty knew “that just because [an objective is] in the book, people like to teach it and that's not part of our objectives” and that students sometimes “get more objectives they need” or none at all. She shared that a lot of “blood, sweat, and tears” went into the year of planning the new program. Administrator Iris recalled they spent hours discussing learning theory and evidence-based practice for at-risk students. Ohio, an administrator, explained faculty completely tore the previous math system down and started all over again, shifting the way in which they “taught it, changed the materials [and] changed the pedagogy. It is no longer a stand-up lecture course.” Faculty members Lena and Katie both shared that a key component of the new system was teaching students basic study skills along with math concepts to “develop the student, and not just [the] math skills” (Lena). This new College Prep Math (CPM) model contained four categorizations, starting with CPM I that provided a mathematical foundation, to CPM II-IV that integrated arithmetic and algebra.

Lena explained that the CPM sequence offered students "extra help and different approaches" to learning through a variety of teaching modalities. Utilizing a team teaching approach, two to four sections of students are combined with a faculty guiding each section, along with a position created just for CPM, a developmental math lab instructor (DMLI). Ohio described these instructors as "full-time instructional personnel, but they're not" full-time faculty; rather, they are skilled in teaching math. The multiple math instructors and DMLIs offered a variety of learning methods while providing students with extra support.

The math faculty and DMLI worked together to teach the student sections in multiple classrooms. Katie detailed a class format that met two days a week, where students "would go to large group [room] and have a 35-minute mini lecture" provided by a different instructor each day. Using a bell system, students would then "move and go to a computer [lab] for 35 minutes" where they would work on homework. The next 35 minutes, students would "go back to the large group and get another mini-lecture and then they [began] a small group activity" where they would collaborate on solving mathematical formulations. Instructors and DMLIs would walk through these "clusters" of classrooms to ask questions and offer help.

The new CPM sequence was different from a traditional course format in several other ways. Math instructors taught the same weekly lesson plan and followed a testing schedule designed by a course coordinator from each CPM sequence. The faculty could choose the teaching activities for their classes. A change in the schedule had to be approved by each person teaching the cluster. Katie, a course coordinator, revealed, "I was like a dictator" as she handed out teaching schedules and test templates to

instructors, while ensuring they followed the course format. Ohio confirmed this belief, stating administration "made [instructors] stick to" the curriculum and class formats if they wanted to teach CPM courses.

The new sequence shortened the students' time in class, as it "incorporated a large [number]… of 8-week sections based on AtD data showing a higher success" rate with this time frame (AtD Annual Narrative and Financial Report, 4/30/2011). This evidence-based decision ensured that students progressed through the math sequence faster if coupled with forced enrollments. This meant that if a student "enrolls in this CPM 1 for the first 8 weeks, [they are] automatically enrolled in the CPM 2 for the second 8 weeks" with the same process for CPM 3 and CPM 4, explained Lena. This format ensures the students maintain information so that they are more prepared for college algebra. The short 8-week course format and forced enrollment "shorten[ed] the time to degree completion," for students as well. Another big change due to the CPM sequence was the design of the course placement tool for students.

Along with the redesign of the developmental math sequence, the faculty decided to eliminate the National Test Exams and create a course placement test to better fit student needs. The decision was based on a study conducted by the math faculty in which Ohio indicated they "tried to map placement test scores to subsequent success in pre-college level material" and found zero correlation. Faculty designed a new placement test that they "could tailor to the objectives we want" and use to provide instructors a clearer idea "of where [students] really belong." Faculty spent a tremendous amount of time working with the college's testing center to write and refine test questions.

The creation of the CPM required cross-departmental collaboration and inter-department training. Lena stated the committee needed the "support of Enrollment and [Student Services, Academic] Advising and the administration -- because we had to have so many things come into play" in designing the new format. In spring 2010, full-time faculty started training adjuncts for CPM implementation the following fall. Administration "supported this effort heavily by giving…internal grant money to train [math] adjunct faculty and our full-time faculty in how to…teach as a member of a team" (Ohio). Achieving the Dream provided some funding for the math redesign, also. In addition, the team teaching approach inside the classroom allowed full-time instructors to provide additional training to adjuncts.

**Sub-theme 2: Developmental English redesign.** As a response to the CCA plan to reduce student time in developmental courses, the college offered a co-requisite lab along with the Composition I course. Carmen, a faculty member, stated that students "on the cusp" of testing at a developmental English level would be placed "in Comp I and [while taking] an additional writing lab course," both taught by the same instructor. Additional efforts to reduce remedial course were set in place, as well.

Administrators directed faculty to combine the developmental reading and writing classes into one single course, "thereby reducing the number of [student] hours in developmental English" (Nova). The faculty named the new course College Prep English. However, the following year administration decided that faculty needed to redesign the course, again. After reviewing the AtD data and evidence-based research, a committee consisting of English faculty, the dean, and a curriculum specialist met weekly to

restructure new course objectives, assignments and lesson plans-ultimately creating a consistent curriculum for all course sections.

**Sub-theme 3: English Composition I redesign.** With the developmental course redesigns and a new strategic plan set in place, administrators at Quad-C set their sights on credit-bearing classes required for a degree. Specifically, they focused on those classes that students were required to complete before starting a major-commonly known as gateway courses such as English, math, and science. Even though student success rates in all developmental courses increased, there was a decline in success when they reached college-level courses. After experiencing success with the CPM restructure, administrators made the decision to apply for a Title III Grant through the United Stated Department of Education to revise these gateway courses. The grant's purpose was two-pronged: focusing on student advisement services and curriculum redesign of gateway courses.

Citing the college's low student retention, graduation, and university rates, the grant specified a solution to "revise academic and student service processes." One answer was a student advising software program that Lacy, an administrator, described "as an early alert system." Along with the software's ability to guide students in the selection of courses and monitor progress to degree completion, information such as high school grades and attendance is pipelined into the system to help advisors and faculty identify early on what students need to succeed.

Specified in the grant and determined through data collection, administrators identified ineffective teaching strategies for those students considered at-risk because they needed problem solving and critical thinking skills. A solution was to increase

faculty professional development with "proven practice and [learning] theory" as detailed in the grant. In addition, grant writers called for a course redesign of all Quad-C gateway courses and "inclusive [with] collaborative learning classroom designs." The classrooms were designed to entice collaborative group work, with movable tables, computers around the parameter of the room, and television monitors throughout the classroom, allowing students to work individually or in groups. The classroom supported cooperative teaching activities that offered alternative learning methods for at-risk students. Upon Quad-C receiving the grant in the fall of 2014, administrators announced the English Composition I courses would begin the redesign immediately; however, the news came as a surprise for the English faculty.

Administrators informed the Quad-C community of the grant and the coming redesign of the composition course at the first all-faculty meeting of the fall semester. For faculty member Olivia, "it was a surprise to us," and she felt the message was a negative representation of the English Department. When her faculty colleagues privately discussed the announcement, they would make sarcastic remarks about being "such lousy English teachers. If we [only] knew how to do our jobs." Carmen reiterated that there was "no faculty involvement in the grant process" as well as no dean involvement in writing the grant.

Iris, an administrator, remembered that with limited time to meet the grant deadline, there was minimal faculty input on its content. Even though the "deans were having conversations with faculty" about the grant, they were all intentionally excluded from its development. She admitted that faculty did not respond positively to the grant, and by not consulting them, it created "a huge barrier" between administrators and

faculty. In retrospect, Iris considered the failure to include faculty in the planning process a "huge mistake [that administrators are] still paying for" in the sense that, as stated by Olivia, "there was a lot of push back" from faculty once the redesign started.

English faculty, institutional and departmental administrators formed a committee immediately to begin the course redesign and to meet its fall 2015 implementation deadline. Mariah, an administrator, said the redesign had to be finished in the spring so that training could begin in the "summer for all of the faculty- full-time and adjuncts." The committee, consisting of five faculty members and a couple of administrators, met twice a week for two semesters. The committee followed the process detailed in the Title III Grant and it "entailed wiping everything clean and starting over," according to Carmen. Utilizing competency-based learning theory, the group revised the course content by either revising or creating new course objectives and goals, a process similar to the CPM redesign. Mariah explained the committee used Bloom's Taxonomy "and [that] using certain terminology [would] make things a lot clearer for students and instructors." She felt with 70-80 Composition I instructors-mostly adjuncts, the revised objectives helped them understand the purpose of the course and to stay on track.

Creating consistency among all course sections became a primary focus in the redesign. Faculty member Olivia shared that students would report, "watch[ing] films all the time" or playing games in class, when other students would recount writing multiple papers and learning Modern Language Association style guidelines in other courses. She felt some instructors "weren't really teaching Comp and, therefore, our students weren't sometimes ready to write papers in every class." Carmen reported that administration wanted "a more consistent grading system that students could understand." Mariah

elaborated that instructors would be "scattered…all over the place," offering arbitrary points for the course, assigning too many or not enough assignments, and not evaluating the proper course objectives, resulting in students complaining about the inconsistency among instructors. This was a common occurrence experienced by math faculty as well. The lack of uniformity made it hard "to figure out what's working and not working with the curriculum…the measurement piece is the important piece and [it is] what drives a lot of the curriculum redevelopment." Eventually, 70 percent of the Composition I Course curriculum would be consistent across all sections.

The committee designed the class into units, each with a set of objectives. Mariah explained the units ensured that the instructors would be "at similar places in the semester and they're doing similar types of assignments" and using the same set number of points for the course. Carmen recalled the committee worked to guarantee "all the essays [and tests met] all the objectives." Since there were a high number of adjuncts instructing Comp I, the group provided "teaching materials… wanted to provide examples for lessons for instructors to use." Mariah expanded that there are "a lot of examples or [instructors can] modify [assignments], as long as the core things are there so that it meets… the objectives and what you're measuring for the course [in order] to create that bit of consistency." She felt the committee remained diligent to the course mission and grant requirements by constantly inquiring if a new objective, assignment, test, or lesson was measurable and could be efficiently taught to other instructors.

During the two semesters, the committee worked on the redesign and they ensured faculty not serving on the committee were kept abreast of discussions and curriculum decisions. Olivia, a faculty member, explained that they "always knew what

was going on and that [all faculty] participated" in committee decisions. Carmen felt the emails communicated that the committee was "doing the best" they could under such stressful circumstances. Olivia had doubts faculty "would have been that well informed" from the other committee members. The consistent reporting of committee activities and discussions proved to increase some faculty buy-in when the committee announced the new changes.

Faculty expressed some hesitation about the newly designed curriculum. Carmen recalled, "We got a better reception than we thought. Mostly because all of the full time [faculty]… They knew how miserable this process was." The committee did receive opposition when they presented the "scoring guide…the number of points that we assigned to different objectives. This is the first time ever, as a department, we [have] used the same grading rubric." Olivia felt the faculty opposition was because it was "a little different from what they'd been doing." Carmen explained that the instructors have their "pet things," as an instructor may want an "organized essay… somebody else wants a grammatically perfect essay… somebody else wants more critical thinking. [The new score guide] reigned all that in." She was amazed that there "was not much argument about what types of essays we would teach" since it consumed hours of discussion within the committee. Olivia was relieved of the committee's choice in assignments, because she "taught the same kinds of essays" and the curriculum was "so similar to what [she] did anyway." She felt that most of the faculty felt the same as she did about the essays.

Once the following summer arrived, it was time to train English faculty members on the "new curriculum, the new philosophy and models or teaching strategies" (Mariah). Olivia felt that "the training was done really well" and that "the committee… not only

explained how they envisioned everything, but also some what they went through to come to [an] agreement" on the final product. Lacy an administrator, appreciated how the grant confirmed committee faculty to "train the rest of the English faculty members" to use the core content of the new redesign.

Some faculty resented the training. Olivia felt these feelings were made "early on," because they were not "bought into [the grant] earlier" and felt administration should have announced the grant and English Composition I redesign differently. On the other hand, Olivia stated, "Some people are reluctant to change no matter what- even though it could be better, they're reluctant to accept change." Iris, an administrator, observed that for some faculty, "it's the first time they've had content focused conversations" and they now have to focus on "the teaching and learning." She felt a reason for the faculty push-back of the redesign was the "strong identity professionally that college faculty have with their content." Iris explained that with learning new teaching strategies and curriculum, faculty would "go through the process of grieving" the loss of their old teaching methods. Olivia recalled that administrators had to be "autocratic" with some faculty because they would have "fought [the training] unless it was communicated that we would do it and …by this date." Similar to the CPM and the online instructor courses, teachers would not be allowed to teach the course unless they completed the training.

The faculty seemed apprehensive at first to the new curriculum. Administrator Mariah conveyed to them that administrators and faculty "are responsible when [students] take a course" and are held accountable by the state regents. We're responsible for what we say we're teaching our students, and that's what they're being taught." Olivia expounded as she discussed the new curriculum and that "there's an assessment in

place…something you're supposed to follow. And I think that most of the [faculty], if they followed it, found that they felt better about themselves as teachers." The participants felt that with the new redesign, assessment set in place, faculty accountability, and confidence would increase.

However, some felt that relying solely on the data to make decisions was detrimental to knowing the students' full story. "You can't report stories to reporting agencies and to Achieving the Dream," Carmen reflected. Nova, a faculty member, stated, "Everything was about data. Our administrators would tell us 'we don't care [about the] little anecdotal stories you know… shut up, give us numbers.'" The personal stories of students provided an explanation as to why they were not passing in an instructor's courses. For some faculty, the institution's drive to view and use data left behind the equally important details of individual student experiences and efforts to succeed.

**Theme 3: A "Set Curriculum"**

Just as the course redesigns were a common theme discussed among all of the participants, they also talked about a result of the new courses-a consistent curriculum among all class sections. The developmental math program was the first program to establish consistent curriculum in order to increase efficient assessments. Instructor Katie elaborated, "We just feel like, if everybody is not testing the same thing, how can you compare or how can you get the numbers" to measure course effectiveness.

The College Prep English course redesign followed suit of CPM. Nova described the design of the new course as "taxing, [because] we were supposed to have total consistency amongst sections, and at that time we had a lot of sections of our second

level reading/writing course" that were taught by a high number of adjunct faculty. She elaborated that senior administrators expected all instructors to use the same teaching activities, assignment, and test schedules. Nova felt this was "hard for educators," as they need flexibility in the way they teach their classes.

Citing the success of the CPM course formats and curriculum design, administrators set the same criteria for the Title III grant to redesign gateway courses. The grant narrative identified faculty committees would "work to ensure curricular and skill alignment through each" course content and assessment. However, the criteria proved to be a challenge.

Creating a consistent curriculum proved to be a challenge for the Comp I committee. Carmen likened the redesign process to a "nightmare." She recalled a time during the redesign where administrators wanted the course to be 100 percent standardized and that faculty "had to fight for [30 percent of] academic freedom" in the classroom. For instance, the committee "created the essay assignments and then we gave [three] different prompts that faculty members could take it in different directions." The committee would "fight" for hours on particular assignment prompts. Carmen did not feel that by providing instructors writing prompts to choose from met the definition of academic freedom. She recalled administrators told the committee members, "We need to provide support for the adjuncts. But there are a lot of faculty members [who] feel like it's just a way to achieve complete standardization and one of the administrators either guiding or controlling" what happens in the classroom. Carmen felt the institution's push to increase degrees was "the struggle between if we have standardization, we can control the input [and] we can control the output" of degrees. She likened the process to placing

students on a conveyor belt, “spit[ting] them out and they will be graduates.” Carmen admitted she liked the end result, but did not like the struggle to maintain some autonomy in class.

Mariah felt the “set curriculum” held faculty accountable in ensuring they were teaching the appropriate course objectives and measuring student-learning outcomes. She stated faculty “can't figure out what's working and not working with the curriculum” if there is not an alignment with class assignment, course objectives, and assessment. Some participants expressed the set curriculum began “high collaboration” (Ohio) among faculty members, as they were having similar experiences in the classroom.

**Theme 4: Institutional Accountability**

Continuing in the innovative spirit of Quad-C’s history, the college collaborated with AtD to increase degrees and certificates. Over a decade later, members of faculty implemented major course redesigns in the developmental and credit bearing courses. Along the way, Quad-C staff, administrators, and staff institutionalized the college’s dedication to student degree completions by increasing professional development, collaborating with Complete College America, and implementing a new strategic plan.

**Sub-theme 4: Professional development.** During the time AtD started workshops at Quad-C, administrators implemented steps to increase professional development across the institution. Through an AtD national presentation, they learned about the Johnson Brothers, who administrator Paul described as “the gurus of cooperative learning.” David and Roger Johnson are both scholars and directors of the Cooperative Learning Center in Minnesota. The college paid the brothers to train 20 faculty members in three subsequent workshops over the course of a year. During the

next three years, these faculty members trained up to 150 faculty members to use cooperative learning techniques in over 45 courses, including CPM. The technique "uses small groups of students within the classroom to accomplish classroom tasks" to enhance learning (Monitoring Report, April 2011, p. 12). Paul stated that even though the use of the new skills raised the success rates slightly, they provided "a richer educational experience for students" and moved some instructors away from traditional lecture-based teaching.

In addition to the professional development in collaborative learning, instructors slated to teach online courses would soon be required to complete an orientation training. Student success in online education was a constant concern for the college because "students were 20 to 30% less successful" in online courses than on-campus classes, recalled Iris, an administrator. A committee was designed to work to "clos[e] the gaps" (Paul) between the two course formats. The committee found it important that instructors learn various pedagogy methods specific to online learning that would get students involved. Later, in 2015, online instructor training became mandatory before one could teach an online course, just as the math department established mandatory training for new faculty teaching CPM course.

**Sub-theme 5: New partnership.** In 2011, the state's governor announced a partnership with Complete College America (CCA), a Bill and Melinda Gates college degree initiative. The alliance was a move to increase the state's educated workforce. The following year, Quad-C followed suit and joined with CCA, a move that focused on reducing "remediation, mostly at the community colleges and small regionals- to find ways of getting students through [developmental] courses" faster, as remembered by

Ethan, a faculty member. Administrator Paul expanded that a CCA focus was to "keep the remediation as low as possible" through evidence-based decision-making. The institution continued to be an AtD college, but, as stated by Paul, "re-branded" its degree completion program to Complete College Quad-C.

**Sub-theme 6: New strategic plan.** In 2013, Quad-C administrators implemented a 5-year strategic plan entailing Quad-C's dedication to increasing degrees. Iris, an administrator, described the plan as "new mission and vision, our big goals for our institution." One major goal for Quad-C was 2018 graduates by the year of 2018, a 50% increase in total graduates. Administrator Paul proclaimed, "The way to institutionalize something is you make yourself accountable in your plan," as observed in two key initiatives listed in the new plan already established by the college: the partnership with CCA and an increase in professional development of Quad-C faculty and staff. Through the journey of course transformation, the administrators and faculty experienced great success with the new course designs.

**Theme 5: Successful Outcomes**

Upon the implementation of both the Developmental Math and English course redesigns and the English Composition I course, student success rates started to increase. Once AtD coaches held workshops and seminars focused on ways to compile and analyze data more efficiently and Quad-C staff started to utilize the information to gauge program and classroom effectiveness, and implemented consistent professional development, the college started to see an increase in student success.

Beginning with the College Prep Math, developmental courses increased student success in the classroom. This was defined as "students who complete their course work

with a grade of A, B, C, or S (Satisfactory)" (Quad-C Monitoring Report, 4/27/15). Administrator Ohio proclaimed that CPM "revolutionized the way our developmental math students [learned]. The success went way up." In 2010, the success rate in developmental math was 53.4 percent (Quad-C Monitoring Report, 4/27/15). After the first year of CPM implementation, the success rate jumped to 62.6 percent and to a 67.9 percent rate in 2016 (Quad-C Monitoring Report, 4/17/16). Ohio explained that students enrolled in developmental math decreased time to degree completion and that "their persistence and retention increased. We found the students that came through developmental math were actually more successful in some cases than our students who tested directly into college algebra." Katie had a similar perspective and added that "[fewer] people [are] withdrawing from their developmental" courses.

Every summer the CPM full-time faculty members train all math adjuncts on the CPM sequence and teaching strategies. Lena, a faculty member, stated that during the training they always "present some numbers that show [CPM] enrollments…show our success rates …since we implemented this sequence," a move that Katie recollects verifies "We've got the numbers to prove what we're doing is working." They both felt that sharing the data with adjunct faculty validates the time spent in training learning new evidence-based teaching methods and assessments.

The College Prep English (CPE) course experienced an increase in "subsequent successful course completion of English developmental students" (Mariah). In 2013, the success rate in developmental math was 51.9 percent (Quad-C Monitoring Report, 4/17/16). After the first year of CPE implementation, the success rate was 53 percent and jumped to a 63.2 percent success rate in 2016 (Quad-C Monitoring Report, 4/17/16).

Since the implementation of the CPE and the co-requisite one-hour lab with a Comp I course, enrollment in developmental English has greatly reduced, a goal for both Quad-C and the CCA initiative.

When the study's interviews were conducted, the new English Composition I course had been in operation for one semester. Mariah stated, "All Comp I [rates are] up for our first year redesign. When you're talking about approximately 125 to 150 Comp I sections- to have that many and have [rates] go up the first year of implementation is unusual." She felt that the points could be higher, but she was happy with the slight increase. Mariah felt one benefit of the set curriculum was that it encouraged faculty to "talk to each other about what's working and what's not working [in the curriculum]. That's what they come and tell me has been great, that they can talk about it with each other because they're all doing it." Professional development increased the instructors' use of assessment in the classroom, too.

Administrator Lacy believed the additional training was beneficial, especially when faculty trained other faculty on new teaching methods and assessments. After the course implementation, administrators conducted "surveys [and] focus groups" of faculty members to get feedback on the new curriculum. They learned that once faculty started implementing various teaching strategies and "spending more time on evaluating students' work in the classroom, they're seeing a lot more success with the students." This could indicate that instructor confidence may increase when they use new teaching methods and assessment, as previously indicated by faculty member Olivia.

As a result, faculty professional development became a focus for Quad-C. Professional development of fulltime and part-time faculty proved to be an effective

method to increasing student success. For example, after employing the mandatory instructor online training, the gap of success rates between the online and on-campus courses narrowed. Furthermore, CPM faculty made training mandatory for instructors. Administrator Paul explained, "Where the [student] success agenda meets the academy is …faculty profession development on teaching and learning-pedagogy and andragogy." Faculty member Ethan clearly summarized a foundational element of Quad-C's success with his words: instructors have to "redesign the way [they] teach" to increase student success in the classroom.

After a decade of conducting research, redesigning courses, and implementing countless student service initiatives, "the college met its strategic plan 'Big Goal' of increasing the number of graduates 50 percent – two years early" (Quad-C FY 2018 Annual Plan, 2017). In 2014, Quad-C was selected a one of sixteen community college that received the Achieving the Dream Leadership College status. Administrator Paul explained that a school had to have "three years of demonstrated success…and an extensive vetting process" to receive the status. He stated that the CPM course redesign was the reason Quad-C earned the recognition. Lacy reiterated that reviewing student success rates within the programs and institution produced an effective call for action: "To me, Achieving the Dream was a Godsend to us because people started to recognize the importance of numbers" in making decisions that would help students succeed.

## Chapter Summary

Even though there was no single indicator of which degree effort at Quad-C was the most effective, this study observed those efforts of faculty and administrators participating in course redesigns. After partnering with AtD to increase student success

and degree completion, coaches created opportunities for faculty and administrators to examine program effectiveness in creating student success. Over a span of ten years, the developmental math and English faculty and English Composition I faculty took part in a complete course redesigns. The outcome was total consistency among all course sections, assignments, tests, and assessments for each course redesign. Administrators declared this would make measuring course effectiveness easier and some faculty agreed. However, some faculty responded negatively to the set curriculum and felt administration had too much control over classroom practices. All programs experienced an increase in student success in the classroom and the graduation rates increased for the institution. Quad-C was eventually recognized as an AtD Leadership College for the successful outcomes. Professional development for faculty also increased in the college. Considering the community college as a system with many parts, or units, Chapter 5 will apply a systems theory understanding of the process.

# CHAPTER V

# THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter will analyze the findings using two theoretical lenses, General Systems Theory and Social System Theory. The purpose of this case study of an urban community college was to explore the experiences of faculty and administrators involved in college degree attainment initiatives, such as the redesign of courses intended to increase student success within the classroom. A single research question and two sub-questions guided the study: How are Complete College America initiatives implemented on a community college campus? What is the faculty experience of the process of implementing the CCA agenda? What is the administrators' experience of the process of implementing the CCA agenda?

## Context

To create institutional transformation that will lead to more 21st century college students earning degrees, multiple levels of external and internal constituents were involved. State legislators had expectations, representatives from non-governmental organizations brought ideas, and faculty and administrators collaborated to develop best practices. In an effort to stay relevant in the suprasystem of higher education, Capital

City Community College (Quad-C) adapted to the demands of the external environment by employing degree completion initiatives. Successful implementation of these initiatives required efforts on the part of institutional- and department-level administrators as well as faculty working together within their departments. Individuals in these various subsystems within Quad-C participated in this study, reflecting both on their individual experiences, and on the existing and emerging institutional norms highlighted by the change process. Participant experiences differed according to which subsystem(s) in which they belonged within Quad-C. Applying an open social systems theory provided robust analytical tools to examine the institutional and human efforts required to implement degree completion strategies.

**Quad-C and the Environment**

Banathy (2000) explored the relationship between an organization and its environment through a systems theory lens. He concluded that systems possessed, "Four major characteristics: (1) systems are goal oriented; (2) systems have inputs from their environment; (3) systems have outputs to achieve their goals; and (4) there is feedback from the environment about the output" (as cited by Mizikaci, 2006, p. 43). Quad-C is a system as it relied on its environment and feedback to make decisions related to output production, or student degree completion. Beginning with the AtD partnership, administrators, staff and faculty began exploring the effectiveness of the subsystems within Quad-C in meeting the organization's goals.

Quad-C was a goal-oriented system, reflected by the complex units, in this case, the college divisions, academic departments, administration, and student services. These units, or subsystems, are interdependent and interact to complete Quad-C's mission to

produce graduates (Meadow & Wright, 2008). According to Bertalanffy (1968), the units' collective interaction makes a bigger impact on goals than the distinct function of each individual subsystem, as is evident with Quad-C's graduation goals. An imaginary or physical boundary around these purpose-driven activities separated the organization from other structures and defined the system's external identity, or its "public image," within society (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 95). Community members recognized Quad-C as a community college, educating students of various ages, backgrounds, and academic abilities, with most living within the region.

Quad-C "achieve[d] appropriate relations with [its] environment [in order] to survive" by adapting to the ever-changing surroundings (Morgan, 2006, p. 38). The inputs, or "energy elements from the environment," that penetrated Quad-C's boundaries played a significant role in sustaining the organization's livelihood and function (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 98). "Boundary spanners," or organizational representatives, enter the environment to locate and retrieve inputs, while creating a "flow of energy in and out of the institution" (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 95). At Quad-C, administrators and faculty created relationships with environmental sources, such as AtD leaders, state legislators, local general education administrators, and business leaders to maintain the function of the college and to establish a "clear image" of its purpose. Exhibited within the dataset were two forms of input: signal and maintenance.

Quad-C's partnership with the AtD leadership and data coaches provided the institution information through signal inputs, environmental information and/or data used for decision making about its performance (Bess & Dee, 2008). For instance, instructor Ethan remembers, "People [came] through campus and [did] workshops and talk[ed]

about assessment, data collection and what that meant" to student success in the classroom and degree completion for the institution. In addition, in the beginning stages of restructuring the new developmental math sequence, College Prep Math (CPM), administrator Iris recalled using research-based evidence for new, creative ways to teach at-risk students and for new course formats that would shorten "the time to degree completion" for the students. A final example was Quad-C later joining forces with Complete College America, an initiative supported by the state's governor to increase the workforce with skilled graduates. Quad-C boundary spanners aligned the college's interest with that of the state legislators: to utilize data pinpointing to student obstacles in the classroom and reducing remedial education to shorten student time to degree. Additional inputs provided the college the financial support to carry out these data-informed decisions.

Maintenance inputs provided Quad-C with environmental resources that assisted in completing its overall goal. Tuition, new faculty, and students were three common maintenance inputs required for the college to complete its objective in providing courses and degrees. In addition, financial support from AtD provided the opportunity for faculty members to plan and implement the restructured developmental math program. Both AtD and Complete College America initiatives funded the planning and implementation of the online instructor course training. Furthermore, the Title III Federal Education Grant brought in additional financial assistance that supported the redesign planning and implementation of 16 gateway courses. These maintenance inputs were critical to the effectiveness of Quad-C's degree completion efforts.

Quad-C graduates were an "exported product of the system," otherwise known as system outputs (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 105). Critical to the sustainability of Quad-C was the evaluation of the usefulness of its outputs to the environment. This evaluation from the external entities, such as workforce leaders and other universities, returned to the system, known as an external feedback loop (Banathy, 1973). An example of this feedback is signal inputs (Banathy, 1973). The decision to collaborate with AtD in 2007 was made with internal system data feedback, which indicated that almost half of the students in developmental math and English were failing or withdrawing, and graduation rates were at an all-time low. In addition, external feedback from regional workforce data aggregates alerted Quad-C boundary spanners to a decrease of a skilled labor force within the state.

This feedback triggered "some adaptive reaction" by Quad-C (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 106). The data revealed faculty members from the developmental math and English, and the Composition I programs committed the most time to the planning and implementation of the course redesigns at Quad-C, in order to increase student success in the classrooms and, thus, increase institutional graduates. Banathy (1973) states, "feedback employing systems are adaptive and self-regulating" (p. 9), a process known as homeostasis, the system's tendency to adjust its internal operations to return to a state of equilibrium and efficiency to meet the demands of the environment.

The study's dataset confirmed Quad-C as an open system, reliant on the environment for its sustainability. In contrast, a closed system will experience entropy, in that it loses energy because it does not gain new energy from the environment (Morgan, 2006). Quad-C, with increasing pressure from businesses and legislators to produce

skilled workers and its concomitant student success challenges particularly in developmental and gateway courses, was in danger of sliding into entropy in 2007. Without vital information from the outside to guide its purpose, an institution of higher education can become so large and diffused that roles and responsibilities may become distorted, making it difficult "to identify precisely what each component does" for the overall function of the system (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 106). With these financial resources and environmental feedback, faculty and administrators assessed Quad-C's internal operations, resulting in a multitude of change efforts, such as course redesigns, in order to increase a skilled workforce.

Interconnectedness of subsystems is a major concept in systems theory. After experiencing the success of CPM, Iris recalled the college's president was eager to implement additional course redesigns. Administrators coordinated the developmental English redesign. Later, leaders applied for the Title III grant for funding the redesign of sixteen gateway courses. Furthermore, implementation of mandatory online instructor orientation became a requirement. This data directly connects to the interconnections of the college's subsystems, as a single positive change in the system can cause "a ripple effect or chain reaction" throughout the whole, forcing adjustments in other areas (Rothwell, 2013, p. 46).

**Quad-C and its Internal Operations**

Equally important to the system's sustainability was the internal functions of the system, the relationships of the individuals and groups that work together in order to ensure the system completes its goals. Parsons (1951) defined a social system as the interaction between the human "actors" of groups who are bounded together by the

organization's purpose (p. 5). Individuals operating within Quad-C belonged to subsystems whose functions supported the college's purpose. Bess and Dee (2008) compared the function of these units "as miniature systems, complete with their own components, goals, and relationships among them" (p. 108). The goal of the faculty functioning within the three academic programs was to transform the student-inputs through teaching, thereby developing student-outputs prepared for other courses.

Concepts from Hoy and Miskel's (1996) open social system model were applied to the data collected in this study in a post hoc fashion as a tool to gain insight into the experience of participants in various subsystems, as they engaged in degree completion initiatives on a community college campus. The author's developed the model for K12 education in order to identify internal behaviors that affected teaching and learning within a school system. Hoy and Miskel (1996) identified important components of performance in a formal organization, positing, "Behavior is a function of the *interaction* of these four elements": structure, individual, the culture, and the political system (emphasis in original, p. 30).

***Structure.*** The structure is the "official blueprint" for a formal organization (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 26). Quad-C's bureaucratic roles were defined by organizational rules, regulations, and expectations established within hierarchal positions and offices, such as managerial and technical subsystems. Faculty belong, Birnbaum (1988) explained, to the technical subsystem that is responsible for the system's purpose, which, in Quad-C's case, is "the actual process of teaching" students (Parson, 1960, p. 60). Within the technical subsystem are smaller subsystems, the academic programs. Faculty in higher education possess firsthand knowledge of the teaching process and what the

institution needs to produce graduates, making them the authority of the process (Birnbaum, 1988; Parson, 1960). During the planning and implementation of the course redesigns, faculty gave the most time to the efforts. Administrators were also involved in the process.

Quad-C administrators belonged to the managerial subsystem, their role defined as mediators "between the organization and the external situation, and the 'administration' of the organization's internal affairs…involving decision-making processes" (Parsons, 1960, p. 62). One such instance was Quad-C administrators serving as boundary spanners, collaborating with state legislators and conveying information related to their expectations to faculty and staff, while coordinating reform initiatives. Within a system of higher education, Parsons (1960) and Birnbaum (1989) considered faculty the experts of the institution's primary function; whereas, administrators are vital in providing the resources that allow faculty to operate.

Parsons (1960) considered these institutionally defined roles and expectations as normative dimensions of activity that, similar to Hoy and Miskel, are structured and legitimate roles and expectations designed specifically so that the organization accomplishes its goals. Once math faculty contemplated the data of poor student success and heard administration's calls for change, they made a collective decision to, as Ohio explained, "completely remodel" the development curriculum. Katie recalls that once the math department made this decision, "administration was on board," providing the group financial resources in making changes the faculty deemed important.

Birnbaum (1989) viewed colleges as open social systems and to understand the interactions between the internal subsystems, one must know "how they're connected or

coupled" (p. 35) to one another and the environment. Even though the math faculty shared the same goals as administrators, they had the autonomy to make the required changes specific to their needs without disrupting the whole system, operating as a loosely coupled subsystem (Weick, 1976, p. 41). This autonomy allowed the program to be sensitive to the external environmental needs, while allowing for "localized adaptation" for needed change in order to increase the effectiveness of the system (Weick, 1976, p. 6). Important to the program's redesign, the math subsystem was tightly coupled to other subsystems. For instance, to make changes in the math placement test and to acquire funding to provide professional development for adjunct faculty, the math subsystem coupled with the testing center and administration, as they shared important common elements relative to the system (Birbaum, 1989).

However, the data revealed a contrasting view of subsystem collaboration between administrators and faculty involved in both the developmental English and Comp I course redesigns. Nova recalled administrators approaching the developmental English faculty with the message, "We are going to do [a course redesign] for everybody [in the college]," beginning with her program. She remembered faculty did not have a choice in the new redesign. Departmental leaders, administrators, and program faculty began the planning and implementation of the course redesign, and similar to the CPM, resulted in a set curriculum for all course sections. Next, administrators applied for the Title III grant with no input from the faculty. The grant led to the redesign of the Comp I course and other gateway courses. Carmen remembered that she "was one of five faculty members [on the redesign committee]…our dean and then a couple of administrators who were either guiding or controlling the process- depending on who you talk to." Birnbaum

explained a downfall for loosely coupled subsystems might be that they take too long to respond to the system or environmental expectations, and may be a reason for the program's lack of response to the low student success rates in their department. On the other hand, this example exhibits administrators making decisions that affected both English programs without their consent or guidance, displaying a more tightly coupled and rationally managed process.

***Individual.*** Operating within the organization's bureaucratic structure are "individuals with…personalities and needs-dispositions," or the personal dimension of activity exhibited by the human actors working in the (sub)system (Getzels et al. 1968, p. 56). Hoy and Miskel's (1996) study was focused on the individual's "motivation and cognition [that] are influenced by … beliefs about personal control and competence" in a formal organization. Exploring the personalities and needs of the individuals was beyond the scope of the study; however, Ohio pointed out, "Being math people, [faculty] looked at all the data…they don't argue with the data. [Students had] a 12% chance of getting through [to the] college level math class…they knew that what we were doing was not satisfactory," highlighting some personal attributes of the faculty.

Getzels and Guba (1957) explained that to understand how the college functions internally to complete its goals, one must observe the "social behavior" (p. 56) of the human networks interacting between the normative and personal dimensions of activity. Getzels et al. (1968) concluded that when the organization's values are congruent to the employee's personal values and beliefs, job satisfaction and system efficacy increases. Considering institutional administrators and AtD leaders were implementing a "data

driven" environment at Quad-C, the mathematically inclined instructors seemed to accept and align with the values of the organization and its goals.

Hoy and Miskel (1996) suggest that in a formal organization, "Work motivation constitutes the single most relevant set of needs for employees" and they construct their workplace reality and a self-reflection of their performance through their personal experiences, beliefs, and goals (p. 27). Administrator Ohio defined the relationship between the faculty and administrators as supportive and "egalitarian." Katie explained math faculty "were blessed from the top," indicating they were granted power from administrators to make course changes faculty deemed necessary for their department. They expressed pride in their hard work and the success the program had achieved, as reflected by Katie when describing the work of her colleagues, "We don't just sit back." The way a person perceives power and their ability to set professional and personal goals, will affect their outlook of failure and success, influencing the employee's cognitive understanding of their job and the motivation to complete it (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). The restructure experience seemed to have positively affected how they perceived their job and performance as professionals.

Faculty members' collective effort to redesign the developmental math program describes what Berrien (1962) refers to the "homeostasis of groups" (p. 528). Comparable to the self-regulating actions of a large system, human groups "operate in such a manner as to perpetuate the group" (p. 528). As revealed through the data, this group of math faculty developed the CPM as a way to counteract outside forces before, as Ethan stated, "something [is] imposed on" the instructors. The design and implementation of the CPM exhibited the group's "formal achievement" or discharge of its formal function, a critical

element of homeostasis (Berrien, 1962, p. 529). The successful efforts of the math subsystem met the "group-need satisfaction" (p. 530) of its members, specifically, the sense of belonging to a group with similar views and motivations.

In contrast, most English faculty revealed a different view of how they perceived their workplace and the motivation to perform. Olivia recalled that after the administrators announced the institution received a grant to redesign gateway courses, immediately beginning with the Composition I course, faculty "went around [joking with] each other… [saying] if we weren't such lousy English teachers." They may have interpreted administration's decision to implement the course redesigns, without faculty input, as a signal they were incompetent as professionals and they acknowledged to be "embarrassed" by the managerial subsystem stepping into the role as "academic authority," a move that, Ethan explained, administrators "traditionally left to faculty" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 10). Andes (1970) believed that when administrators neglected the faculty's expertise, it caused "indifference on the part of the faculty which further" (p. 59) delayed the attainment in the university's goals.

With Quad-C administrators instituting decisions usually left to faculty, the leaders seemed to have used coercive power, leaving the English faculty with a feeling of no control (Birnbaum, 1988). The author credits the use of this power to possibly "increase[ing] alienation and decreas[ing] the effectiveness of normative" (p. 14) activity important to the function of Quad-C, as exhibited by the initial push-back of the changes. However, the faculty group in homeostasis as they worked diligently to meet work expectations set by administrators to continue Quad-C's relevance in the suprasystem. Leader behavior is what Berrien (1962) defined as "forcible compliance [by

administrators are], designed to perpetuate the group" (p. 530). Critical to observe is that the English faculty group maintained the group's significance to the system through shared communication and support to each other.

***Culture.*** Hoy and Miskel (1996) define culture as the "shared work orientation of participants; it gives the organization a special identity" (p. 25). The authors stated that culture "blends the formal with the personal to create a system of shared beliefs" (p. 29). While members balanced the organization's norms and roles with their individual work needs, they interacted with others throughout the larger system. Participants shared a common description of Quad-C culture, as expressed by Lacy, when reflecting the innovative spirit of the college, "If we fail, we start over." Ohio agreed, saying, "That's just in our tradition" to be innovated and to not fear failure. As the data revealed, faculty and administrators at Quad-C implemented a wide variety of initiatives to increase degrees. Overtime, the institutional members formed a collective way of thinking defined by shared norms and values and the formation of an informal culture. The "culture distinguishes one organization from another" and individuals may develop "a sense of organizational identity" (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 29). This shared orientation between work groups or subsystems is a strong influence in organizational behavior.

***Political.*** Hoy and Miskel (1996) conceptualized organizational politics as informal and illicit, but a potentially powerful force used to benefit a person or group, usually at the expense of the institution. At Quad-C, state legislators noticed the high student dropout rates in higher education and voiced concerns to institutional leaders. As a response, administrators at Quad-C collaborated with the AtD foundation and, later when the state's governor joined forces with Complete College America, which lead to

the college following suit. Identifying possible political factions and their affects within Quad-C is beyond the scope of the study, but it is worth noting the outside forces that played a vital role in the institution reform.

The interaction between the bureaucratic structure, the individual's work needs, the organizational culture, and political facets offer insight into the social behavior of the internal units working together to meet the system's goals. Further, the interface between the four elements and the environment external to the college further affected internal operations (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). The administration's role focused on the meeting the demands of external constituents in order to perpetuate the system's significance to the environment, specifically, to produce graduates who would work in knowledge-based workforce. Faculty members at Quad-C developed and implemented course redesigns that proved to be highly effective in degree completion efforts. The administration's role during the course restructures toggled between being supportive to "autocratic" (Olivia), resulting in faculty experiences that varied depending on the subsystem in which they belonged. Math faculty had positive experiences that aligned with their collective values and beliefs and those of administrators. On the other hand, the English faculty questioned the administration's lead to restructure key courses; faculty perceived the set curriculum and assessment as means to control what happens in the classroom.

## Chapter Summary

Quad-C was established as an open system, by identifying the inputs-transformation-output process, while evolving as to remain significant within the educational suprasystem and the community. An open social systems model defined the interaction between the system's structure, individuals, culture and political factions as

vital components to understand the social behaviors or functions of the workers within the system, gaining insight into the participants' experiences during the college reform. Chapter 6 is a discussion of the study within the related literature and the study's implications and recommendations for faculty and administrators implementing degree completion initiatives.

# CHAPTER VI

## IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter discusses the implications of this study by first comparing its findings to relevant research, and then providing implications for research and practice. The chapter ends with recommendations.

Beginning with the restructured developmental math courses, Quad-C faculty reviewed evidenced-based practices and developed a variety of ways to increase student success. What transpired was "multiple teaching styles…different modalities of instruction... mini lectures… computer assisted work and… small group work," a variety of methods to increase learning for the 21st century student (Merisotis, 2010). Quad-C condensed 16-week courses to 8-week courses so that students could complete two classes per semester, thereby moving into credit bearing courses faster. In developmental English, the reading and writing courses were combined into one course and faculty designed a co-requisite lab student could take while enrolled in the Composition I course.

Similar to Quad-C, a task force in the Florida State College system piloted a variety of programs to restructure developmental education, when in 2013 Florida legislatures passed a bill that required colleges to redesign their developmental courses (Finkel, 2018). Faculty at Florida State College in Jacksonville felt they were "already on the case" when the legislation passed, having set in place a "student-centered model with lab-assisted technology" (p. 40). The bill passed by the Florida legislatures was a catalyst for program developers to compress courses that shortened the students' time to degree.

Comparable to Quad-C, the Florida College System reported a decline in developmental course withdrawals, an increase in student retention and, ultimately, an increase in degrees completed.

Consequently, professional development increased for developmental instructors in Florida colleges just as it did for Quad-C faculty. When considering the shortened 16-week courses, coupled with hybrid and online courses, instructors needed support to increase student success. Madeline Pumariega, the chancellor of the Florida College System, reflected that "faculty had to look at, what are the pedagogical techniques related to shifting [their] delivery strategy?" (as cited in Finkel, 2018, p. 40). Administrators at Quad-C and the Florida colleges "retooled their faculty" through professional development in areas of technology and active teaching strategies (p. 40). Professional training at Quad-C also included adjunct instructors.

The findings revealed that Quad-C administrators made a large investment in professional development for contingent faculty, which is an unusual practice for community colleges (Kezar, Maxey, & Eaton, 2014). This is unusual, according to Cohen and Brawer (2014), because administrators may not have a commitment to contingent faculty, as they are considered temporary hires, and, therefore, not considered worth the investment. However, Quad-C administrators provided internal grant money and AtD financed the training for developmental math adjunct faculty and, later, the Title III Grant funded professional development. Leaders seemed to understand that limiting professional development for adjunct faculty could be detrimental for developmental education, as part-time faculty are more likely to teach students in developmental math or English (CCCSE, 2014). The study's findings revealed that professional development at

Quad-C focused not only progressive teaching methods or curriculum design, but also how to assess student learning.

Higher education scholars worried that in the push to escalate degree obtainment, student-learning outcomes (SLO) were being overlooked (Rhoades, 2012; Rutschow et al., 2011). This study's findings revealed that each of the redesigns of Quad-C courses included the development and implementation of assignments and rubrics specific to assessing SLOs. However, when committee members introduced the various ways to assess SLOs, they experienced two obstacles with faculty: inconsistent knowledge of rubric terms and disagreement of points per assignment. Iris stated, "By faculty having to use the rubric, [the trainers] realized [faculty] didn't have a common definition" for evaluation terms frequently used in the program. Quad-C trainers often "returned to the literature" to define the terms and then practiced evaluating assignments from other courses as part of faculty training. The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILO) surveyed institutional leaders regarding activities related to assessing learning outcomes, which revealed community colleges, "more than other institution type, indicated professional development opportunities for faculty…and significant faculty involvement as supportive of assessment" (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014, p. 24). Professional development in assessment was actively implemented on campus, with very little faculty complaints about the process.

The newly developed rubrics and assignments were only some of the outcomes in establishing a "set curriculum" for all class sections, which clashed with some instructors' professional values. Carmen remembered rolling out the new curriculum and noting what was challenging for the faculty; "faculty members didn't like was the

number of points that [the committee] assigned to different [learning] objectives. We all have our pet things." Faculty varied on what they perceived as critical in evaluating student learning. Some instructors wanted to focus on or emphasize critical thinking, while others were more concerned in having essays grammatically correct or honing in on the organization in the essay. The rubrics combined all of these elements. Regarding the NILO survey, leaders claimed that to increase institutional improvement, faculty would need to embrace the assessment process and utilize the results (Kuh, et al., 2014). Thus, leaders indicated a need for faculty to learn how to develop and utilize assessments.

Establishing a set curriculum for three courses was an unusual, and perhaps disorienting, turn of events, especially for some full-time and most adjunct faculty at Quad-C. However, administrators and other faculty members championed standardization of curricula and assessments as a way to ensure students were learning the appropriate objectives and holding instructors accountable for teaching and measuring them. Leading experts in higher education and student learning have questioned the wave of standardized assessment, through "defining student learning outcomes and finding some way to gauge whether colleges have achieved those goals" (Lederman, 2019, para. 4). There has been concern that assessment could easily become a "bureaucratic machine" that administrators hastily created to prove to external constituents that the institution is meeting its demands. Therefore, institutions are urged to ensure "whether we're teaching what we're trying to achieve, and is the design still a good design" (para. 19) or is changed needed.

The American Federation of Teachers ([ATF] 2011) stresses that "frontline faculty members and staff should drive the processes of curriculum development,

teaching and assessment to ensure that education practices are effective and practical in the real-life classroom" (p. 4). In addition, the group warns against standardization comparable to that found in K12 systems:

> Elementary and secondary education is mandatory and aimed primarily at producing a somewhat uniform set of education outcomes grade by grade. Higher education, on the other hand, is pursued and paid for by adults who choose institutions and programs to meet their own very diverse education and career goals. This diversity is a great strength of American colleges and universities, and therefore our members are concerned that overstandardizing assessment would weaken rather than strengthen education. (p. 7)

ATF warns that the academic freedom of those teaching in higher education can potentially be weakened by too much assessment methods, diminishing the opportunities to meet the diverse learning styles of students. Even more, community college faculty especially feel a push to eliminate academic freedom (Toth & Ruffus, 2017), which some faculty participants expressed. The expertise of the faculty teaching the courses allows for a more genuine assessment of student achievement.

The dichotomous nature of faculty buy-in was a unique observation prominent in the findings. The developmental math faculty made the collective decision to restructure the program before outside forces imposed changes. Whereas the English faculty felt the administration did impose changes without faculty input, as Oliva explained, "There were some [negative] feelings that were created right there that made people say I'm not doing this." A survey of provosts across the country claimed that "meeting the faculty where they are" in the change process and allowing for time to discuss reform activities benefit

faculty buy-in (Cain & Hutchings, 2013). In the case of Quad-C, after experiencing success with the developmental math instructors, administrators pushed forward to replicate the same outcome with the English program. However, "there was not a whole lot of time for buy-in and conversations-faculty were excluded from that process." The aftermath was faculty distrust of administrative motives and a feeling of no control.

## Implications

The following are implications regarding research and practice when implementing degree completion efforts.

### Research

Research is needed on effective professional development activities inclusive to adjunct faculty; this would also benefit trainers. With adjunct instructors teaching the majority of courses on community colleges, especially in developmental education (CCCSE, 2014), research indicates they are less likely to use high-impact teaching modalities, compared to full-time instructors. Ohio confirmed this observation when recalling the math faculty initially began team teaching in that is "not normal. Math teachers are not trained to teach as a member of a team…They're trained 1 [teacher] on 30 [students]." Evermore, the reduced time in the classroom calls for additional research of effective methods, especially with adjunct faculty, that are impactful in the limited time frame.

Research in the professional development of faculty transitioning from a teacher-centered, lecture to a student-centered, active teaching would be beneficial, especially with senior level faculty in higher education. A survey of faculty developers across various levels of institutions reported a moderate level of training was provided to middle

to senior level faculty with faculty developers giving less focus on this age group (Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin, & Rivard, 2016). Discovering effective development strategies would be beneficial.

More research is needed to increase knowledge concerning standardization in higher education. Faculty and administrators at Quad-C differed on perspectives regarding the effect of a set curriculum and testing on an instructor's academic freedom. Research in the area of practitioner knowledge and experiences in teaching a set curriculum would be useful for other institutions deciding to follow a similar process. Specifically, a closer and deeper analysis of how instructors and administrators perceive academic freedom in a community college would be useful for leaders, as this study exhibited a variety of perspectives.

**Practice**

The standardization of curriculum and assessment in higher education has been deemed as a potential threat against the academic freedom instructors' have in designing a course and choosing assessment methods (ATF, 2012; Lederman, 2019). However, this study revealed an increase in student success in the three redesigned courses entailing a set curriculum at Quad-C. Romo and Leinen (2018) claim standardization is important for colleges offering multiple modalities of a course in order to measure student learning outcomes. Actions exhibited during the course reform process included three practices: making faculty as the lead developers, structuring clear student learning outcomes, and providing faculty training.

**Faculty as lead developers.** At Quad-C, teams of program faculty, alongside curriculum developers and administrators, spent months restructuring developmental

courses and gateway courses. Curriculum design teams consisting of community college faculty experienced positive outcomes when collaborating with their peers in developing consistency across program curriculum (Albashiry, Voogt, & Pieters, 2015). The authors' pointed out that this collaborative approach can be "be a novel and complex change for the departments compared with the previous individual and content-based curriculum design practices whereby the curriculum was basically imported from various resources and customized by the course teacher" (p. 619). As a result, working in a team is initially a challenge, making support from curriculum developers critical, but faculty gain a holistic understanding of the program which may stem from developing a set curriculum.

**Clear student outcomes.** Critical to the success of curriculum design in community colleges is designing clear SLOs, especially in efforts to establish a consistent curriculum (Albashiry, Voogt, & Pieters, 2015). Colleges that did not have clear SLOs missed important benchmarks such as program allocation of credit hours or meeting general education requirements for the college. Faculty at Quad-C spoke about revising course learning outcomes, the reason being, Mariah shared, was "To make [them] a lot clearer, [we used] Bloom's Taxonomy… and …certain terminology… to make things a lot clearer for students and instructors" to understand the expectations of the course. Nova felt rewriting the outcomes "made [faculty] think about" what students needed to do in the course. She elaborated, "Everything we did in the class had to have an assignment that was measurable and… linked to the objectives." Even though the process was time consuming, the efforts paid off.

**Faculty training faculty.** In this case study, all three course redesigns were designed and implemented by full time faculty members. In addition, they trained other

full-time and adjunct faculty in the new course formats, curriculum, and assessments. The professional development was not well received by all, as Paul recalled a seasoned faculty member saying, " I got into teaching to sit up there and talk ... share my wisdom with people, and now . . . " a variety of teaching modalities were being mandated by the academic programs. However, faculty push-back seemed to be alleviated when full-time faculty members interacted and worked with adjuncts. Lacy recalled a training led by full-time faculty, in which trainees were surveyed after the implementation, faculty reported "because [they understand] what is needed and they spend more time on evaluating students' work in the classroom, they're seeing a lot more success with the students." Faculty to faculty communication made a difference in buy-in, as exhibited when changes were being made in the Composition I course, Olivia remembered, a committee member "made sure we were always informed….I'm not sure we would have been that well informed" by administration. When the standardized curriculum was rolled out, faculty were not happy with the changes, but accepted them because of the communication they received from their peers. The faculty's acceptance in this context falls in line with Kezar's et al. (2014) research about social groups or networks within higher education. They can lead to change through communication structures, information sharing, developing trust, paradigm shifts, collaborative problem-solving, and handling accountability easier.

## Recommendations

The following are recommendations for administrators and practitioners considering degree completions efforts on their campus.

- Increase adjunct professional development.
- Make professional development mandatory.
- Job listings include a requirement for experience in teaching a variety of modalities, indicating an expectation of pedagogy experience.
- Share data freely and often as proof new initiatives are working.
- Developmental instructors to teach gateway courses to better understand what remedial coursework is missing.
- Recruit faculty to lead training opportunities for other faculty members.
- Discover alternative methods to communicate institutional plans to all faculty.
- Include participant professional background history in future research of degree reform initiatives to inform participant beliefs in student success.

## Chapter Summary

The discussion of literature and implications through the participants' experiences offered some insightful knowledge for practitioners implementing degree completion initiatives on their campus. There continues to be little empirical research focused on understanding practitioner knowledge and experiences regarding college completion initiatives (Bradburn & Townsend, 2014), even though scholars of higher education argue for the importance of faculty in efforts to improve student outcomes (Bensimon, 2007; Jenkins, 2011; Rhoades, 2012; Birnback & Friedman, 2009). This research focuses on administrative and faculty efforts in planning and implementing degree initiatives, ceasing at the point of strategies and activities conducted in the classroom.

The instructors at Quad-C used a variety of teaching modalities amid shortened time-frames in the course. Supporting the variety of teaching styles, professional

development has increased for both community college full-time and contingent faculty. Additional research is required to understand what development methods work best for senior faculty. The set curriculum in higher education exhibits the possibility of diminishing creativity that meets the needs of the 21st century student. However, Quad-C experienced high student success rates among course redesigns implementing a set curriculum. Factors that contributed to this success were enlisting faculty as lead developers, developing clear student learning outcomes, and faculty training other faculty in program changes. Further research is needed in the areas of contingent faculty development and instructor experiences utilizing a set curriculum. Practice must to take into account the occurrence of initiative fatigue and how it affects faculty and administrators. Recommendations are provided to ensure student success, specifically in hiring new faculty with experience in a variety of teaching methods, enlisting developmental faculty to teach gateway courses to gain a deeper understand of student issues, using data in trainings to justify the work and finding alternative way to communicate change efforts.

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APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Semi-structured Interview Question Guide

### Director of Institutional Effectiveness

1. What is your role on this campus?
2. I am interested in CCA efforts of [college name]. Please describe institutional efforts to increase student degree completion on your campus.
3. Tell me your involvement in these efforts.
4. How do you perceive the CCA efforts in your institution?
    a. What supports are in place?
    b. What barriers have you observed?
    c. How has the institution worked to overcome those barriers? How well have those efforts worked?
5. How do people on campus view their roles with regard to degree completion efforts?
6. What else do you find significant about degree completion efforts on your campus?

## APPENDIX B

### Semi-structured Interview Question Guide

### Department Head

1. What is your role on this campus?
2. I am interested in CCA efforts of [college name], describe institutional efforts to increase student degree completion on your campus.
3. Tell me your involvement in these efforts.
4. How do you perceive the CCA efforts in your institution?
    a. What supports are in place?
    b. What barriers have you observed?
    c. How has the institution worked to overcome those barriers? How well have those efforts worked?
5. How do people on campus or in your department view their roles with regard to degree completion efforts on campus?
6. What else do you find significant about degree completion efforts on your campus?

## APPENDIX C

### Semi-structured Interview Question Guide

### Full-time Faculty

1. What is your role on this campus?
2. I am interested in CCA efforts of [college name], describe institutional efforts to increase student degree completion on your campus.
3. Tell me your involvement in these efforts.
4. How do you perceive the CCA efforts in your institution?
    a. What supports are in place?
    b. What barriers have you observed?
    c. How has the institution worked to overcome those barriers? How well have those efforts worked?
5. How have has degree completion affected your teaching?
6. How do people on campus or your colleagues view their roles with regard to degree completion efforts on campus?
7. What else do you find significant about degree completion efforts on your campus?

## Appendix D

## Document Summary Form

Name or Type of Document:

Document No.:

Date Received:

Date of Document:

Event, Contact, or Campus with which Document is Associated:

□ Descriptive

□ Evaluative

□ Other _____

| Page # | Key Words/Concepts | Comments:<br>Relationship to Research Questions |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

Brief Summary of Contents:

Significance or Purposes of Document:

Salient Questions/Issues to Consider:

Additional Comments/Reflections/Issues:

Adapted from Miles & Huberman, 1994, as cited from Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008

## Appendix E

INTERVIEWEE DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Section A: Interview details (Interviewer complete)

| | |
|---|---|
| DATE and TIME | |
| INTERVIEWEE IDENTIFIER | |
| LOCATION OF INTERVIEW | |

Section B: Basic demographics (Interviewee complete)

| | |
|---|---|
| Age | 25 and under □<br>26-35 □<br>36-45 □<br>46-55 □<br>56 and over □ |
| Gender | Female □<br>Male □ |
| Ethnicity | |
| Nationality | |

Section C: Detailed questions (Interviewee complete)

| | |
|---|---|
| What is your position or occupation? | |
| What training/qualifications do you have that are of relevance to your current position or occupation? (e.g. PhD, Master's degree, certificate, etc.) | |
| How long have you worked in this position or occupation? | |
| Can you describe what you do in your position or occupation? | |

# Appendix F

# IRB Approval

**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Date | Monday, December 19, 2016 | Protocol Expires: | 12/18/2017 |
| IRB Application No: | ED15166 | | |
| Proposal Title: | Understanding the college completion agenda. The lived experience of faculty and administrators on a community college campus | | |
| Reviewed and Processed as: | Expedited<br>**Continuation** | | |

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) **Approved**

Principal Investigator(s):

Carolyn Cox
16967 W 736 Rd
Tahlequah, OK 74464

Tami Moore
2439 Main Hall
Tulsa, OK 74106

Approvals are valid until the expiration date, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:

Subject involvement complete approval for analysis of identifiable data only.
Change title from "Understanding the college completion agenda on two campuses: The lived experience of faculty and administrators" to "Understanding the College Completion Agenda: The lived experience of faculty and administrators on a community college campus". No withdrawals, complaints, or new/additional funding.

Signature :

Hugh Crethar, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Monday, December 19, 2016
Date

## Appendix G

## RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

## OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: Understanding the College Completion Agenda on a Community College Campus: The Lived Experience of Faculty and Administrators

INVESTIGATORS: Carolyn Cox, Doctoral Student, Oklahoma State University

Tami L. Moore, Adviser, Oklahoma State University

PURPOSE: The purpose of this qualitative, multi-site case study is to explore what it means to administrators and faculty to have a degree completion initiative on their respective campus. The inclusion of both administrator and faculty experiences will support a rich empirical dataset relevant to ongoing national conversations about reconciling emphasis on graduation statistics with learning outcomes in the evaluation of college completion initiatives.

PROCEDURES: By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in the study. You will be given a copy of the consent, which includes contact information for the researcher, adviser, and university IRB. I will conduct one interview, which will last approximately 1.5 hours each. I will record the interviews via digital voice recorder and then transcribe them to an electronic data file with no identifying information. Additionally, no identifying information about participants will be reported in the research or reports.

Once the interview is transcribed, you will have an opportunity to review the printed transcript. You may be asked via email or telephone or in person, if preferred, to participate in a follow-up interview to clarify your earlier comments. Follow interviews will last approximately 15-20 minutes.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION: There are no known risks associated with this project, which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: This study will increase the minimal empirical research on community college faculty and administrators involved in college completion initiatives. Furthermore, the study may enhance practitioner and administrator collaboration efforts in institutional reform activities that increase positive student outcomes. Above all, the study has potential to inform future decisions on policies and programs that affect national degree attainment that possibly may increase skilled jobs important for the nation's workforce and the economic security of employees. If interested, I will send you a copy of the results of the study when it is finished via email.

CONFIDENTIALITY: To protect the identity of participants in this study and possible future publications, participants will be referred to as "faculty and administrators in community colleges in the south central United States". Each participant will be

assigned a pseudonym, which will be used to identify that participant throughout the data collection and in the analysis of the individual case record, as well as in the presentation of findings to ensure privacy. The participant identifier/pseudonym document will be stored electronically in a file on a password-protected computer; the laptop will be stored in the home or locked office of the principal investigator. After the member checks are completed, the identifier/pseudonym document will be shredded.

The researcher will make digital copies of the signed consent forms and participant demographic sheets, and store them in a separate file from the pseudonym identifier document on the password-protected laptop of the researcher. The paper consent forms and interviewee demographic sheets will be shredded after the digital copy is complete.

Paper, audio and electronic copies of any data will be stored in the principal investigator's office in a locked file for no more than five years, at which time they will be destroyed. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in the research.

CONTACTS: If you have questions or concerns about participating in this research study, you may contact the researcher at (918) 931-7433 or by email at carg@okstate.edu; you may also contact her adviser, Tami Moore, at (918) 594-8107 or by email at tami.moore@okstate.edu.

For information on participants' rights, contact Dr. Heather Crethar, IRB Chair, 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405.744.3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:

I understand that my participation is voluntary; that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty.

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION:

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____ _____

Signature of Researcher Date

## Appendix H

### Participant Recruitment Email

Hello, my name is Carolyn Cox. I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program. I am conducting a qualitative research of degree completion efforts within a two-year institution of higher education. This study entails the perspective of both administrators and faculty members on an Oklahoma community college campus.

I hope to interview you for my study. Please note that your willingness to participate in this study is confidential and there are no negative impacts on you should you choose to decline to participate. All participants in this study will be kept anonymous. The interview will be kept to one hour and any follow-up questions will be asked via email. Would you be willing to meet with me within the next month to discuss my research? If so, please respond with your availability so that we can select a day/time that works for both of us.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at 918-931-7433 or green@nsuok.edu.

Thank you for the consideration,

Carolyn Cox
PhD student
Oklahoma State University

VITA

Carolyn S. Cox

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: UNDERSTANDING THE COLLEGE COMPLETION AGENDA ON A COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUS:
THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS

Major Field: Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 2019.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Social Work at the University of Oklahoma, Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2002.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Social Work at Northeastern State University/College, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in 2001.

Certification:

2005 Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Experience:

Northeastern State University, Department of Social Work
Non-tenured Instructor and Field Director (BSW and MSW)
August 2006 to present

Muskogee Youth Services
Mental Health Professional
June 2002-2006