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A BALANCING ACT: RECONCILING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE WITH A TRADITION OF UNIQUENESS IN COUNTERCULTURAL LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

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A BALANCING ACT: RECONCILING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE
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IN COUNTERCULTURAL LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
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ABSTRACT

The current investigation explores the impact of societal shifts in commercialism and consumerism on lesser-known colleges with a tradition of liberal arts education. I present a descriptive case study that examines the perspectives of a total of 39 faculty, students, and administrators at two countercultural liberal arts colleges in the Northeastern United States, which continue to successfully balance external demands with their commitments to liberal arts education. Findings suggest a model for change in which all stakeholders focus on their shared institutional goals to creatively address challenges in a way that supports their commitment to liberal arts education. Both case institutions improved their financial positions and achieved record levels of enrollment by involving their campuses in effective planning and self-assessment, and as a result, redefined the role of liberal arts education for the twenty-first century.

A Balancing Act: Reconciling Organizational Change with a Tradition of Uniqueness in Countercultural Liberal Arts Colleges

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> We've seen a climate in which a consumer mentality governs everything, and the most important outcome of an education is a marketable degree. Our response is to hold true to our mission. If liberal arts colleges fall prey to the fancies of our age, or fail to resist the challenges to our mission, we risk becoming a part of the indistinguishable mass of schools who do what they're told -- by their governments, their students, or their marketplace -- rather than what they believe to be right.
>
> -Christopher B. Nelson, President of St. John's College (2007)

> Rankings create powerful incentives to distort institutional behavior and diminish valuable differences among institutions…Second, rankings reinforce a view of education as strictly instrumental to extrinsic goals, such as acquisition of prestige or wealth, that is antithetical to … the ideal that all liberal arts institutions hold dear — that higher education should produce intrinsic rewards, such as liberation, creative fulfillment and self-realization.
>
> -Colin S. Diver, President of Reed College (2007)

St. John's College and Reed College may be the most resistant colleges to the forces of consumerism and the intense competition that now place demands on institutions to pursue wealth, fame, and exclusivity regardless of whether or not it fits their institutional traditions, culture, or mission (Breneman, 1994; Carey, 2006; Delucchi, 1997). However, even at fiercely non-conformist institutions, such as Reed and St. John's, college presidents face external challenges that threaten to turn liberal arts colleges into what President Nelson (2007) describes as an "indistinguishable mass of schools." The pressure to compete with other institutions also reflects the current value structure of the higher education industry and society as a whole (Graubard, 1999). Greater competition between institutions is symptomatic of the

social fancies of consumerism and materialism, but perhaps is more related to the declining public support and scarce resources for the higher education industry as a whole (Gladieux & King, 1999; McGuinness, 1999; Neely, 1999; Zusman, 1999). The challenges brought about by greater competition among institutions for scarce resources have also led to the quest for greater external recognition, through an emphasis on fundraising and increasing selectivity (Alfred, 2006; Ramsey, 2006).

This prevailing higher education value system manifests itself best in the emphasis that the public and university leaders place on media recognition including college rankings—most notably the yearly publication of the *US News and World Report's Best Colleges* (Clarke, 2002; Trainer, Trosset, & Sapp, 2000). Critics have noted that the media only laud institutions that possess vast resources and name recognition, rather than indications of instructional ingenuity or student learning outcomes (Brooks, 2005; Carey, 2006). However, liberal arts colleges may not be able to ignore the media or college rankings without risk to their institutional survival, given that rankings unfortunately serve as a primary source of information for prospective students (Ehrenberg, 2002; Myers, 2007). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the millions of copies of college rankings purchased each year, researchers have demonstrated how improvements in college rankings benefit private liberal arts colleges and how decreases in colleges' rank harm their enrollment, academic selectivity, and financial health (Monks & Ehrenberg, 1999).

The current study concerns the consequences of a commercially-driven and consumer-oriented mentality on lesser-known institutions that have a learning culture

of liberal arts education. The liberal arts education philosophy emphasizes intellectual fulfillment over vocational training and promotes undergraduate development through personalized learning (Hersh, 1999). Although all colleges and universities increasingly must demonstrate an ability to nurture basic cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies (e.g., the ability to think critically, communicate effectively, understand diverse cultures, contribute to the betterment of society), liberal arts colleges have historically placed these as their most central educational values. Whereas other institutions place emphasis on remedial skills, adult education, vocational training, graduate education, or research output, liberal arts colleges focus their resources squarely on training enlightened undergraduates. As a consequence, liberal arts colleges often provide the best educational environment for individuals who desire a more individualized college experience.

Despite a shared tradition of liberal arts education, liberal arts colleges vary in their selectivity, visibility, and curricular approach. The focus of the current study centers on perhaps the most unique and vulnerable liberal arts colleges in the higher education environment—i.e., those that lack the wealth and prestige to offset their small college status. In the book *Forty Colleges that Change Lives*, Pope (1996, 2000, 2006) examined lesser-known liberal arts colleges that were highly successful at preparing students for entry into top graduate schools, employment, and humanitarian work. Despite often being ranked in the top tier of national liberal arts colleges by *U.S. News and World Report*, these lesser-known colleges typically have smaller endowments and prestige than the elite liberal arts colleges that dominate the top 50

slots on the rankings list. Pope attributed the "value added" –i.e., the exceptional growth and development of students—to the uniqueness of the undergraduate experience offered not only to high school graduates who were "A" students, but to "B," and even "C" students, as well as students with learning or physical disabilities. He argued that these unique colleges extend students greater opportunities to form collaborative relationships with both their faculty and peers, and challenge students to examine and defend their value system from an enlightened perspective, evolving through critical consideration of a range of intellectual thought from across the ages.

In many ways, these unique colleges serve as beacons for the ideals of American democratic values, as they lead to inclusive college environments where students actively participate and invest in the betterment of themselves, their colleges, and their communities (Canada, 1999). The highly interactive and personal nature of these colleges creates an environment where students enjoy greater influence over institutional decision-making, thus enhancing the desire and skill of students to speak-up on important institutional and societal issues.

In addition, the curricula of these institutions focus more on challenging students to critically examine their values and develop a meaningful philosophy of life, rather than providing specific vocational training. Pope's (2000, 2006) argument does not imply that other types of institutions fail to impart democratic values or that liberal arts colleges should not prepare students for technical or high paying careers, but that liberal arts education produces an institutional culture particularly well suited to enhance the civic-mindedness of students.

Although Pope refers to these colleges as "colleges that change lives," I instead prefer the term *countercultural colleges*. For as it could be argued that many different types of institutions provide a life-changing experience for students, these institutions are unique in their educational practices and organizational cultures and contrast the 97% of American public and private colleges and universities that do not fully adhere to the liberal arts education philosophy (defined fully in Chapter 2). Thus, when I refer to countercultural colleges, I am referring to the same type of institutions that Pope describes as life changing.

Given that countercultural colleges are often overshadowed by large research universities and elite liberal arts colleges, these colleges remain more vulnerable to market forces (Alfred, 2006; Breneman, 1994). In a system that values, recognizes, and rewards only those colleges and universities that possess wealth, fame, and exclusivity (Carey, 2006; Haycock, 2006), pressure to obtain these desirable yet elusive characteristics can—as President Diver (2007, p. 1) of Reed College notes—"diminish valuable differences between institutions." Given that the values of prestige and wealth are "antithetical" to the unique liberal arts mission to produce "intrinsic rewards such as liberation, creative fulfillment, and self-realization" (Diver, 2007, p. 1), many countercultural liberal arts colleges stand at a crossroads between revenue generation and dedication to their academic tradition (Gomes, 1999; Van Der Wef, 1999a, 1999b).

In order to fully understand how countercultural liberal arts colleges are responding to these changes, I utilize *institutional theory* to help explain the external

pressure toward industry homogenization in times of great competition (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) and examine the rate and process of organizational change through Lewin's (1951) *force field theory* and Senge's (1990) concept of *a learning organization*.

Problem Statement

External pressures, such as increased competition with other institutions for students, prestige, and financial resources, have engendered change in most colleges and universities (Ehrenberg, 2002; Neely, 1999; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Despite a wealth of research on changes underway in public research universities and community colleges (Altbach, 1999; Zusman, 1999), very little research exists on the response of small liberal arts colleges to demand for commercialization, more specialized or career-focused curricula, and accountability to stakeholders (e.g., alumni, parents, students, and communities). Given the perception that elite liberal arts colleges remain relatively insulated from enrollment and external funding concerns (due to their large endowments and student selectivity), researchers have generally overlooked the challenges faced by smaller, less elite liberal arts colleges (Astin, 1999). As Pope (1996, 2000, 2006) argues, some of these lesser-known colleges provide greater access to a personalized and transformative educational experience for students from a range of academic and economic backgrounds. Because many of these institutions lack the national reputation and financial resources available at elite liberal arts colleges, these small independent colleges find themselves drawn toward a business model of higher education in order to sustain enrollments in

an environment where an increasing majority of students are becoming career-minded consumers of higher education (Alfred, 2006; Breneman, 1994).

What implication does the rise of an educational consumer mentality hold for the future of liberal arts education at these small, lesser-known institutions? To answer the preceding question, I intend to explore what countercultural colleges seek to change about their institutions and how they determine the impact that particular modifications will have on the campus culture and the fulfillment of their liberal arts mission. I anticipate finding an ongoing campus debate about how to address these institutional challenges and how to preserve the commitment to liberal arts education. Ultimately, institutional strategies for handling external threats will either lead to a departure from or an affirmation of traditional liberal arts philosophy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to enlarge our understanding of how internal participants at countercultural liberal arts colleges interpret institutional strengths and weaknesses with regard to external challenges that threaten institutional vitality and their traditional commitment to liberal arts education. The current study focuses squarely on the organizational challenges of lesser-known liberal arts colleges, an area that many researchers in higher education overlook (given that many researchers focus primarily on research universities, community colleges, or elite private institutions). In order to better understand how these colleges maintain their commitment to their liberal arts educational mission in the face of external threats, I developed three specific research questions to guide my inquiry, which I present below.

Research Questions

1. What ideals do faculty, administrators, and students at countercultural liberal arts colleges hold for their institutions?
2. How do internal stakeholders identify and perceive organizational change?
3. How do students, faculty, and administrators identify and address the threats facing countercultural liberal arts colleges?

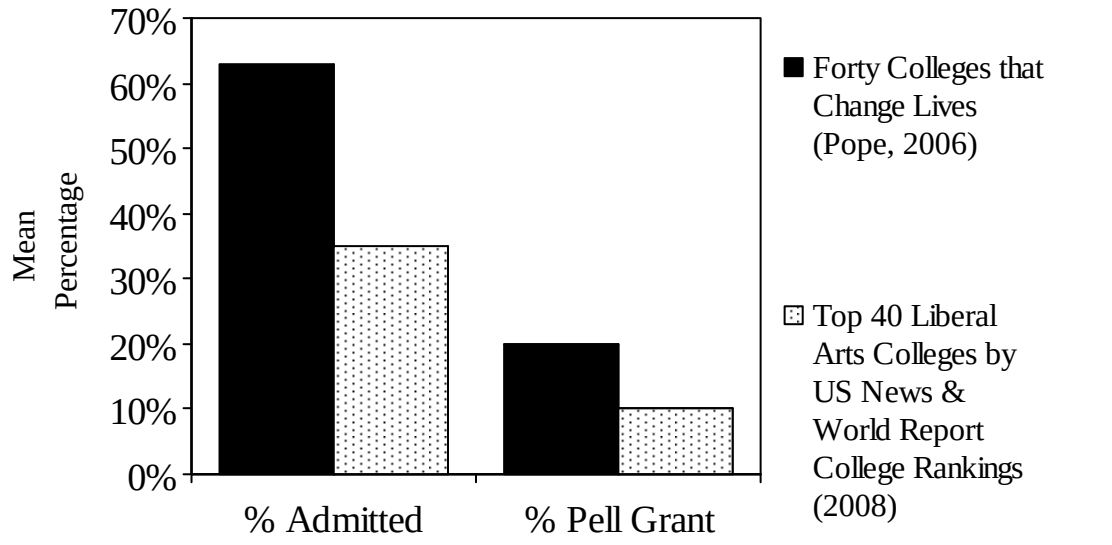
Significance of the Study

The current study illuminates the campus wide debate at two different colleges over how a traditionally countercultural institution should respond to strong external pressures to emulate more conventional institutions. Specifically, I examine the tension of maintaining an institutional mission of a liberal arts education, while seeking a competitive edge in the American higher education system. Thus, this research attempts to elucidate the positive and negative consequences of various institutional strategies, and ultimately the unique educational experiences that would be lost if these institutions gave way to external pressure. Thus, one of the most significant contributions of this work is to demonstrate the importance of these institutions to the institutional stakeholders, larger system of higher education, and society as a whole. In addition, this work serves as a case study for other countercultural colleges to better understand the threats facing their institutions and hopefully offers insights on how to navigate these challenges without losing sight of what makes their institution distinctive.

In highlighting the educational experience at two of the more unusual countercultural colleges, I hope to shed light on a form of higher education that is vastly different from the experiences at most colleges and universities. In doing so, I capture a glimpse of the diverse ways of teaching and learning offered in American higher education today, and attempt to increase awareness about the detrimental effect of limiting the diversity of the American higher education system in general. If countercultural colleges begin to move away from their liberal arts education tradition, they will lose the distinctive educational elements that promote the intrinsic quest of knowledge, personal growth, and global civic responsibility for which they are known. In doing so, we lose benefits of having a vast array of educational opportunities that allow students to find an educational environment that best addresses their needs.

At the macro level, the United States needs liberal arts colleges as part of a diverse system of higher education to remain a leader technologically, economically, and politically in a global society (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance ACSFA, 2006; Callan, 2006). At its core, liberal arts education is founded on the notion that undergraduates must become life-long learners and effective problem solvers. Because a liberal arts education necessitates a multidimensional and integrative approach to problem solving, those trained in the liberal arts tradition should be particularly adept at finding new solutions to ever changing problems. Thus, the current work attempts to underscore the importance of institutional diversity in American higher education for our future prosperity.

Figure 1. Mean comparison of top 40 liberal arts colleges and liberal arts colleges profiled in *Forty Colleges that Change Lives* on the percentage of applicants admitted (i.e. acceptance rate) and the percentage of the student body receiving Pell grants (i.e. highest financial need).



From 2007 data reported to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2008.

Just as it is important to protect the practice of liberal arts education in the United States, it is also important to ensure that a wider array of students have access to this form of education. Many countercultural colleges pride themselves on providing students from diverse backgrounds access to a quality liberal arts education (Pope, 1996, 2000, 2006). The most recent data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2008) indicate that Pope's forty lesser-known colleges are nearly twice as likely as the top 40 liberal arts colleges (ranked by *US News & World Report*, 2008) to admit an applicant and twice as likely to enroll a low income student

who received a Pell grant (see Figure 1). However, pressure to garner resources by increasing their visibility, may lead countercultural colleges to reexamine their openness to a wide range of potential students (Breneman, 1994; Stimpert, 2004), as greater selectivity bolsters institutional prestige and even college ranking. Such trends could limit access to liberal arts education for members of socially and economically disadvantaged groups.

Finally, in addition to shedding light on the importance of countercultural colleges to higher education and society in general, the current work may help other countercultural colleges negotiate the balance between their past traditions and their future viability, by offering insights into the process of institutional change.

Methodological Overview

In the current work, I applied qualitative methods using a descriptive case study design. I investigated two specific lesser-known liberal arts colleges to get a richer understanding of how countercultural institutions respond to societal demands and economic threats. In order to examine the pressure to pursue wealth, fame, and exclusivity on the continuance of liberal arts education, I conducted on-site interviews (N=39) with students, faculty, and administrators at two countercultural colleges. I also collected other artifacts as data sources, such as mission statements, historical institutional documents, and data from institutional web sites to improve the validity of the analysis.

Definition of Terms

Change (Continuous or Episodic). Episodic change is not part of a long-term organizational plan but is characterized by rapid transformations followed by stability or equilibrium periods. Conceptually, episodic change fits Lewin's force field theory of change (1951). Episodic change is dramatic, driven by external forces, and a reaction of organizations to adapt to the external environment. Episodic change concerns organizational survival in the short term (Quinn & Weick 1999). The ability of liberal arts colleges to sustain a philosophy of liberal arts education may require drastic and transformative changes, especially if the college faces financial exigency. In contrast to episodic change, *continuous change* is characterized by endless incremental modifications in practices in response to daily organizational uncertainties (Quinn & Weick 1999). A strategic planning process should lay out institutional goals and indicators for measuring each goal. The tactics for realizing each goal provide the roadmap for potential continuous changes that can be implemented to achieve long term organizational goals while responding to daily changes. Continuous change leads to organizational transformation over time as numerous accommodations join together. The continuous perspective focuses on long-term adaptability and supports Senge's (1990) concept of a learning organization.

Colleges that Change Lives. Pope (1996, 2000) defines colleges that change lives as institutions that possess the following characteristics: 1) student-faculty interaction, 2) collaborative learning, 3) active learning, 4) critical reflection, and 5) a community of scholars. Despite being less prestigious than many large research universities and highly selective liberal arts colleges, these colleges often achieve

disproportionately greater developmental outcomes for students than other institutions, even though they typically accept students from a more diverse array of academic and economic backgrounds.

Consumer-Driven Model of Higher Education. The term (also defined as *Academic Capitalism*) is used to refer to higher educational institutions that emulate educational practices and organizational behaviors that focus on revenue generation through the support of societal obsession with material fulfillment. The consumer-model places emphasis on more specialized training in a specific fields of study, reduced emphasis on intellectual breadth, greater emphasis on the student as a consumer, and professionalization of administrative structure (Slaughter & Rhoads, 2004).

Countercultural colleges. For the purposes of the current study the term countercultural refers to liberal arts colleges that possess the five characteristics of what Pope refers to as "Colleges that Change Lives." In addition, the term highlights the distinctiveness of these institutions with regards to curricular practice, shared governance, and resistance to a consumer-driven model of higher education.

Curricula. Given that each of the case institutions expects all students to formulate their own plan of study (e.g., developing a project topic, designing a schedule of courses that support their project), I refer to each institution as having a set of curricula, as opposed to a single curriculum. This denotes the individualistic nature of each student's curriculum, by demonstrating that there are no pre-set programs of

study (e.g., universal or major course requirements). Thus, the term curricula emphasizes the flexibility of the academic program at the case institutions.

Force Field Theory. The process of episodic change is well explained through Lewin's (1951) force field theory, which posits that change is mostly motivated by external threats to the immediate survival of an organization. Lewin (1951) described change as episodic, containing three phases: 1) unfreezing, 2) transitioning, and 3) refreezing. Unfreezing occurs when people realize that current practices are no longer effective for organizational success. Then, transitioning leads to a reforming of institutional practices to address necessary concerns. In the final stage of refreezing, members of the organization return to a stable—but enhanced—state of being after the successful implementation of the change plan. In the current work, force field theory is used to explain the impact of growing societal materialism, shifting student demographics, and competition with similar institutions.

Institutional Theory. Institutional theory posits that deviations in organizational practices from industry values will likely result in a loss of legitimacy, perceived quality, and a higher probability of institutional failure. In industries with extreme competition, organizations face constant pressure to emulate the practices of their competitors to survive. This competition results in a loss of diversity in institutional practices or institutional isomorphism (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 2001).

Learning Organization. In contrast to force field theory, which views organizational change as episodic, Senge's (1990) learning organizations exhibit

continuous change, given that they are characterized by improvisation, learning, and translation. Learning organizations take an inclusive, collegial approach to continuously adapting and developing over time (Senge et al., 1999). Learning organizations open themselves to change as a continuous process, involving communication and creative thinking at all levels of the organization (Fritz, 1991).

Liberal Arts Colleges. Until 2001, the Carnegie Classification of institutions of higher education had a category describing "baccalaureate colleges-liberal arts" if more than half of their degrees were awarded in the traditional liberal arts subjects (humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences). Currently, they have dropped the term liberal arts, and instead use the two terms, "diverse fields" and "arts and sciences" to refer to baccalaureate institutions. Despite the name change, the term liberal arts college is still widely used to refer to smaller institutions that award primarily or exclusively baccalaureate degrees. Historically, liberal arts colleges tended to be private, residential institutions with small class-sizes and focused on four-year undergraduate education (Breneman, 1994). These institutions traditionally offered few professionally oriented programs (e.g., business, education, technology fields) and for the purposes of this study are characterized by the traits of liberal arts education (see Blaich, et al., 2004).

Liberal Arts Education. Blaich and colleagues (2004) present a theory of liberal arts education, which they characterize as a learning culture rooted in: (1) the intellectual arts, (2) specific curricular and environmental structures (e.g., small class sizes), and (3) student-student and student-faculty interactions.

Organization of the Study

I organized the current work into seven chapters. Chapter One provided an overview of the study, and included sections stating the research problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, and research questions. Chapter Two discusses the relevant literature that will serve as the basis of this study, including scholarship on social, cultural, and economic changes that threaten liberal arts education, countercultural colleges, and institutional diversity. Chapter Three outlines the case study methodology utilized for this study, including a discussion of the design, sample, data sources, procedures, trustworthiness, and data analysis. In Chapters Four and Five, I present the results from each college, "Apple" and "Maple," respectively. In Chapter Six, I present my interpretations of each research question synthesizing the results from Apple and Maple colleges with literature on liberal arts education and organizational change. In Chapter Seven, I examine the implications of the current work for internal stakeholders at the case institutions and for those outside the case institutions. In addition, I proffer future directions for research and present a final conclusion for the study.

The following chapters outline the theoretical and empirical background for this case study of organizational change and the challenges to liberal arts education in countercultural colleges. In my review of literature, I highlight: 1) the unique context of liberal arts colleges and especially countercultural liberal arts colleges, 2) the major external challenges facing liberal arts education, and 3) theories of organizational change that help to explain how these factors affect countercultural colleges. Then,

using this groundwork, I investigate how external challenges have impacted two of the countercultural colleges from Pope's book, from the perspective of students, faculty, and administration.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present the literature on organizational change, institutional uniqueness, and homogenization in the context of countercultural colleges. I divided the literature review into five primary sections: First, I define a liberal arts education and the advantages it confers to students, despite the fact that many self-identified liberal arts colleges have shifted away from liberal arts education to a more consumer-driven and vocationally-focused model of education. Second, I highlight several external challenges facing liberal arts colleges today and how these challenges may lead institutions to strengthen or abandon their liberal arts tradition. Next, I describe the unique context of countercultural colleges, and how they differ from the wider category of liberal arts colleges. Finally, I discuss how institutional theory and organizational change theories provide a framework for examining the internal debate at countercultural liberal arts colleges over how to address external challenges.

Defining a Liberal Arts Education

The term liberal arts education is often misused to describe a set of activities that support broadly defined outcomes intended to produce a "well-rounded student." For example, policy makers and researchers of higher education use the terms liberal arts education, liberal education, liberal studies, and general education, interchangeably. Although the aims of liberal education or general education represent adherence to traditional higher educational values to holistically educate students, liberal arts education reflects a distinct philosophy about the practice of higher education. Consequently, the inappropriate use of the term liberal arts education

greatly undermines the ability of authentic liberal arts colleges to communicate what distinguishes their institutional cultures from other types of institutions (Blaich, Bost, Chan, Lynch, 2004).

As the first institutions of higher learning in the New World, liberal arts colleges modeled themselves after the traditional English residential colleges of Oxford and Cambridge (Astin, 1999). Many liberal arts colleges today strive to maintain the traditional English model by remaining small, residential, and focused on undergraduate education. However, the holistic approach to education endorsed by many liberal arts colleges often finds itself at odds with a generally career-focused society and the glorification of the large university in the popular media (Alfred, 2006; Graubard, 1999). A number of scholars have noted a declining proportion of students enrolling in liberal arts colleges within American higher education (Breneman, 1994; McPherson & Schapiro, 1999), and many have asked what the implications would be if these institutions disappeared from higher education altogether (Graubard, 1999; Hersh, 1999; Stimpert, 2004; Wenzlau,1983). McPherson and Schapiro (1999) recently noted that the 200 or so institutions classified as “liberal arts” by the Carnegie Classification System only enroll around 1% of the nation’s 14 million college students, whereas a half century ago, liberal arts colleges made up 40% of all institutions in higher education and constituted 26% of total enrollments (Breneman, 1994).

Liberal arts colleges tend to be private, residential institutions with small class sizes and enrollments below 2,000, and students primarily focus on undergraduate

degrees in the humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences (Breneman, 1994). The faculty at these institutions tend to be well-credentialed with most holding terminal degrees from the most elite research universities. In addition, liberal arts colleges employ faculty highly devoted to promoting undergraduate student development in the classroom and in limited, student-focused research projects (Bourque, 1999; Cech, 1999; Laws, 1999). Moreover, liberal arts colleges offer few or no graduate programs and do not typically employ graduate teaching assistants as instructors of undergraduate courses (Astin, 1999).

Despite the range of colleges that fit the criteria of a liberal arts college, many researchers and policy makers in higher education mistakenly assume that all liberal arts colleges are highly selective, elitist, expensive, and out of touch with the vocational training and educational needs of potential students and their working and middle class families (Astin, 1999; Blaich et al., 2004; Hersh, 1999). This misconception likely stems from the history and visibility of a small number of highly elite liberal arts colleges. Furthermore, with the typical student increasingly concerned with securing a high-paying job (Astin, 1993, 1998), liberal arts colleges may be perceived as anachronistic or less capable of providing the technical and applied training necessary to compete in a competitive job market (Graubard, 1999). Although technical training has its place in the higher education system, many question whether an applied education can sufficiently prepare citizens for a rapidly changing world where the technologies and training of today quickly become obsolete (e.g., Blaich 2004) and knowledge is constantly changing (Senge, 1990).

Furthermore, liberal arts education allows students to develop an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving which is increasingly necessary for a workforce required to tackle more complicated societal and global issues.

Many have argued that the interdisciplinary approach of liberal arts education furnishes the most practical education for a changing world (e.g., Hersh, 1999; Sorum, 1999), given that it expects students to integrate the classical lessons of great philosophers, historians, scientists, poets, and artists across a diverse array of cultures and languages to provide "broad knowledge; timeless skills of understanding, criticism, and communication; capacities of ethical and aesthetic discernment; and a comprehensive vision of the Good" (Churchill, 2002, p. 1). The contribution of liberal arts colleges to the American higher education system stems from the uniqueness of their institutional mission, which places a strong emphasis on a broad liberal arts knowledge base and the application of that knowledge to solving real and complicated world problems (Breneman, 1994). Astin (1999) argues that the quality of undergraduate education and student learning outcomes at liberal arts colleges relates to the following five institutional qualities: (1) small size (2) a residential program (3) a strong faculty commitment to student development (4) trust between students and administrators, and (5) generous expenditures on student services. Importantly, not all colleges that identify as liberal arts colleges possess these qualities or offer a distinctly liberal arts education (Delucchi, 1997).

Perhaps the misidentification of colleges as "liberal arts colleges" stems from the application of the term liberal arts college to institutions that do not provide a truly

liberal arts education (Delucchi, 1997; Neely, 1999). The term liberal arts college has been used broadly to refer to the group of institutions that fall within the Carnegie Classification of Baccalaureate Colleges-Liberal Arts. These institutions are defined as undergraduate colleges that award over half of their degrees in liberal arts fields (Carnegie Foundation, 2001). Using the Carnegie Classification, institutions that vary widely in their selectivity, residency requirements, and curricular offerings all fall into the same category as a liberal arts college (Astin, 1999).

In a recent effort to clarify the differences between a truly liberal arts education and the educational curricula offered at self-identified liberal arts colleges, Blaich and colleagues (2004) developed the *theory of liberal arts education*. The authors noted that the following three conditions must coexist to support liberal arts education:

Factor 1: The Intellectual Arts

Definition: An institutional ethos and tradition places a greater value on developing a set of intellectual arts rather than professional or vocational skills.

Factor 2: Curricular and Environmental Structures

Definition: Curricular and environmental structures work in combination to create coherence and integrity in students' intellectual experiences.

Factor 3: Student-student and Student-faculty Interactions

Definition: An institutional ethos and tradition which places a strong value on student-student and student-faculty interactions both in and out of the classroom.

In contrast to this distinctly defined concept of liberal arts education, many self-identified liberal arts colleges present an education that does not reflect these well-defined tenets. Given my belief that liberal arts colleges should be defined by the academic curricula and environment, as opposed to the proportion of degrees earned in particular fields, I will henceforth use the term liberal arts colleges to refer more specifically to the institutions that accomplish Blaich and colleagues' definition of a liberal arts education, as opposed to the 286 institutions that are currently termed baccalaureate colleges- arts and sciences by the Carnegie Classification System (Carnegie Foundation, 2007).

A liberal arts education represents a major contribution to the diversity of American higher education. Authentic liberal arts colleges foster a philosophy of education for the sake of learning and have resisted the trend toward a more vocationally-focused curriculum (Breneman, 1994; Stimpert, 2004). In these colleges, researchers have found exceptional levels of student learning and development (Astin, 1999; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pope, 1996, 2000, 2006). For example, Astin (1999) found in a longitudinal study of 212 liberal arts colleges that attending a selective liberal arts college (average SAT math and SAT verb totaling 1,200 or greater) had a significant positive impact on a student's critical thinking ability and institutional satisfaction. Thus, he concluded that students who attended a selective liberal arts college will "enjoy unique educational benefits" (p. 94). Despite finding support for the benefits of a liberal arts education, Astin did not compare institutions that practiced liberal arts education to other types of institutions, such as research

universities or regional comprehensive institutions, which offer distinct learning cultures and values.

Even when researchers do compare liberal arts colleges to other institutional types, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of educational training from the pre-existing differences in student populations who attend these various institutions –e.g., differences in standardized test scores, GPA, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Astin, 2003; Pascarella, 2001). However, one major study attempted to address the limitations of past cross-sectional studies by using a longitudinal design that permitted the inclusion of statistical controls for pre-college characteristics and experiences (Pascarella, Wolniak, Cruce, & Blaich, 2004). Pascarella and colleagues randomly selected an initial sample of 2,913 students from the first-year classes at 16 institutions in 13 states for participation in a three-year longitudinal study and looked for evidence that students experienced the best practices in undergraduate education.

The authors based these institutional practices on the *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, 1991), which include: (1) encouraging student-faculty contact, (2) cooperation among students, (3) active learning, (4) giving prompt feedback, (5) emphasizing time on task, (6) communicating high expectations, and (7) respecting diverse talents and ways of learning. The participants completed a variety of nationally-validated survey instruments, such as the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (American College Testing Program, 1990), the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (Pace, 1990), and items developed for the National Study of Student Learning. The

researchers included items to measure a number of pre-college background characteristics, expectations for college, and experiences inside and outside the classroom over a three-year period.

The findings of the study by Pascarella and his colleagues (2004) suggest that students at liberal arts institutions tend to experience best practices in undergraduate education more often than students at four-year regional or research universities, even when controlling for full-time status, on-campus living, academic selectivity, background abilities, motivations, and interests of students who enrolled in liberal arts colleges. However, these benefits were most pronounced during the first-year of college, when 82% of good practices were significantly greater for students in liberal arts colleges over other types of four-year institutions (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Despite the multiple controls of covariates utilized by Pascarella and his colleagues, the researchers note that the results may not be generalizable to all four-year higher education institutions, given that only four liberal arts colleges, four regional universities, and four research universities were selected in their sample. Furthermore, although Pascarella and his colleagues (2004) established that liberal arts education connotes unique benefits over other types of four-year institutions, the researchers could only speculate as to why liberal arts colleges proved more successful at fostering the best practices in undergraduate education.

In a separate study, Pascarella and his colleagues (2006) examined if selective admissions practices led to a more enriched undergraduate learning environment. In their national sample of 3,331 undergraduates from 18 four-year institutions in 15

states, they measured student engagement and best practices in undergraduate education while controlling for student background characteristics (primarily academic background). The researchers found that attending a highly selective institution (in which the median SAT was 1,400 or greater) does not guarantee that students will encounter educationally purposeful academic and out-of-class experiences that are linked to developmentally influential undergraduate experience. If a highly selective institution makes some of those experiences more likely, the difference is minimal and often reflects the perception among selective colleges of very high academic expectations. Thus, the results of Pascarella et al. (2006) discredit attempts to explain away the benefits of a liberal arts education, using an argument that liberal arts colleges succeed by selecting only the best and brightest students.

Instead, the hallmarks of a liberal arts education create an educational environment that encourages student growth and development. For example, in liberal arts colleges, faculty often take a special interest in socializing students into the faculty culture (Riesman, 1998). In fact, over one-fifth of the college faculty in the United States graduated from small liberal arts colleges, despite the fact that these colleges comprise less than 2% of all undergraduate enrollments (Breneman, 1994). Perhaps because of this socialization by faculty, many liberal arts graduates become interested in the academic profession.

Given that the benefits of a liberal arts education appear to stem more from an enriched learning environment rather than pre-existing student characteristics, it

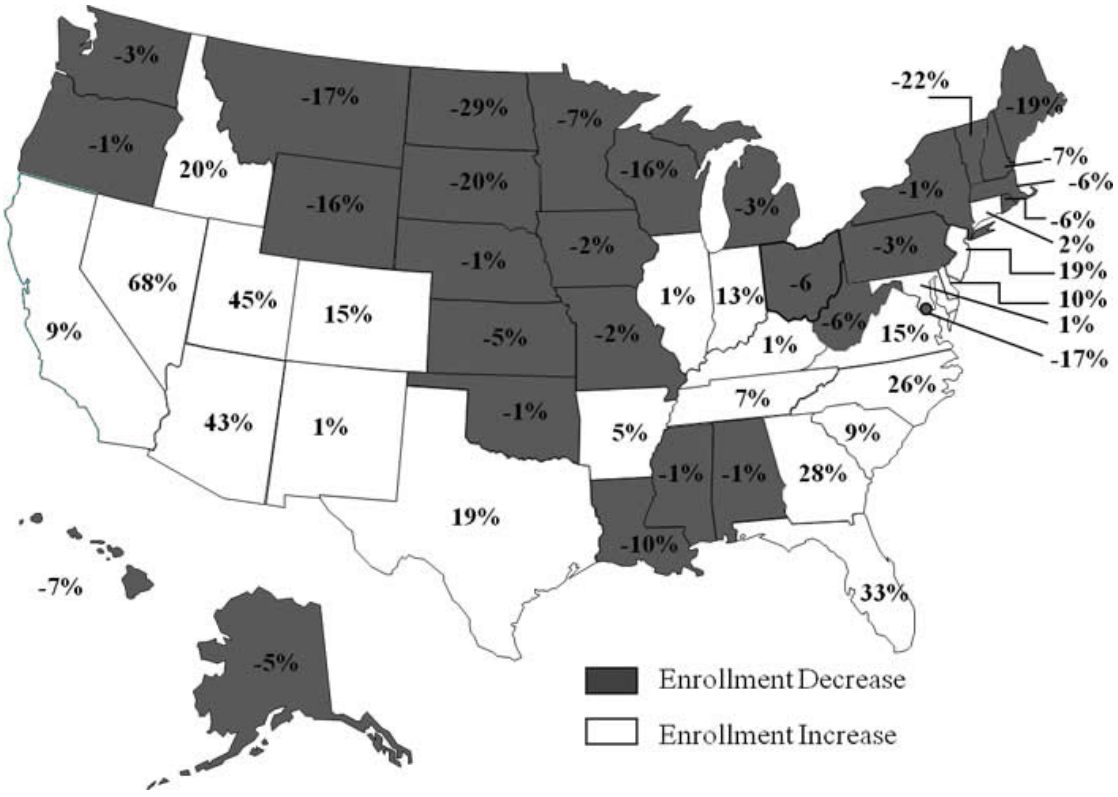
becomes imperative to understand the commercially-oriented and consumer-driven forces challenging the cultural and academic landscape of liberal arts colleges.

External Challenges to a Liberal Arts Education

Since 1980, three major trends have impacted the ability of institutions, particularly lesser-known liberal arts colleges, to maintain a liberal arts education focus: (1) changing demographics, (2) increasing desire for applied education due to careerism, and (3) aggressive competition between institutions (Breneman, 1994). In the following, I delineate these major challenges.

Demographics. The changing demographics of society in general have led to corresponding changes in the college student population (Brown, 1996; Rendon & Hope, 1996). Liberal arts institutions value full-time on-campus residency and course enrollment as essential ingredients in an intensive undergraduate learning experience (Astin, 1999). However, a number of authors have pointed out that colleges need to make adjustments for non-traditional students now that the majority of college students are not under the age of 24 and are not attending full-time (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). National data suggest a continued decline in the percentage of students who would seriously consider full-time oriented residential liberal arts colleges, and thus, liberal arts colleges are left competing for a smaller and smaller pool of interested potential students (Delucchi, 1997; Neely, 1999). For example, in the Northeast—where the preponderance of liberal arts colleges are located— a lack of population growth is projected to impact the number of high school graduates over the next decade (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Projected percent change in public high school graduates, by state: 2004-2005 through 2016-2017.



From "Table 25. Actual and Projected Numbers for High School Graduates of Public Schools, by Region and State: 1998–99 through 2016–17," by U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2006.

Importantly, the data suggests a continued decline in the traditional student population from which liberal arts colleges can recruit students (Jonsen, 1984; McPherson & Schapiro, 1999; Wenzlau, 1983). Furthermore, the influx of first generation college students and those from historically disadvantaged groups, such as the children of Hispanic immigrants into the college market has led to greater

increases in enrollment at regional public universities and community colleges, as these individuals traditionally opt for less expensive higher education alternatives (Rendon & Hope, 1996). Thus, liberal arts colleges have had to devote greater financial resources to recruiting from under represented populations, in order to increase campus diversity and stabilize enrollments in their student populations.

Careerism. Changes in the global economy and society's preoccupation with materialism and personal wealth have intensified a general trend of careerism among college students (Astin, 1998; Hawkins, 1999). Astin's (1998) work on the impact of college on students emphasized a number of findings from the *Cooperative Institutional Research Program* (CIRP) Freshman Survey at UCLA. Astin examined changes in student characteristics and attitudes over the last 40 years, noting substantial changes in the motivations and goals that students report for their lives and for attending college. Most significantly, he discusses the rise of career and economic values and the decline in personal growth motivations for attending college. His results show that in 1966, 80% of students thought it was "essential" or "very important" to develop a meaningful philosophy of life, whereas only 45% of students thought that being well-off financially was an "essential" or "very important" goal. Four decades later, 76% of students view being well-off financially as important or essential, making it the most reported goal, and only 42% viewed developing a meaningful philosophy of life as essential or very important. The CIRP Freshman Survey demonstrates that career and consumer-oriented values have superseded personal growth and learning motivations for attending college (Astin, 1993, 1998).

In addition, more than 70% of college freshmen report that they are “attending college to earn more money” and similar numbers believe that “the chief benefit of a college education is to increase one's earning power.” Astin (1998) concedes that the materialism and career-minded responses peaked in the late 1980s but remain well above their levels decades ago. Consequently, the consumer mentality diminishes student interest in seeking a liberal arts education, and may also diminish their interest in historically underpaid career fields, such as teaching, thus exacerbating public concern about teacher shortages in the future (Saunders, 2007). The declining interest in liberal arts education since the beginning of the 1980s prompted a scholarly debate over the future vitality of liberal arts colleges (Wenzlau, 1983; Breneman’s 1994)

The societal emphasis on careerism and students as consumers has contributed to a reduction in institutions that practice authentic liberal arts education. Empirical evidence suggests that the majority of self-identified liberal arts colleges’ students are pursuing professionally-oriented majors. Delucchi (1997) found that over two-thirds of the 321 self-identified liberal arts colleges that highlighted a strong liberal arts education mission statement were actually dominated by professional majors. Neely (1999) concurred, noting that for most of the hundreds of these self-identified liberal arts colleges, the term liberal arts “represents nostalgia more than curriculum” (p. 36). Moreover, since 2001, the Carnegie Classification System has dropped the category of “liberal arts,” given that so few colleges actually met the definition of having a preponderance of students pursuing non-professional majors (i.e., majors that fit in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences). Instead, the Carnegie Foundation

uses the term “baccalaureate college” to encompass a wider array of four-year colleges, and subdivides institutions based on the proportion of degrees from professional versus arts and science majors. The most recent classification of institutions suggests that only 24% of baccalaureate institutions awarded more degrees in arts and science than in professional fields (Carnegie Foundation, 2007).

Hersh (1999) found that some liberal arts colleges have responded to the societal demands for career preparation by retaining their educational values and publicly placing greater emphasis on internships, international education, writing and speaking abilities, foreign language skills, and computer literacy. However, a number of former liberal arts colleges have sought to raise revenues by embracing career-related training through professional bachelor’s degrees and part-time or expedited graduate programs (Breneman, 1994). A “cafeteria” approach to education has become widespread with the growing consumer-driven mentality in higher education that promises unconstrained revenue streams for colleges and quick degrees for students. Since 1960, the prevailing view in higher education equates general education with liberal arts education, asserting that similar learning outcomes can be achieved when students take a variety of courses at several institutions over a few years or spread out class work over decades (Astin, 1999).

In the book *Take Back Higher Education,* Henry and Susan Giroux (2004) attribute the rise of the career-minded student consumers and the revenue thirsty universities to the ascendancy of neoliberalism. According to Sanders (2007) neoliberalism is “a socioeconomic theory that rejects governmental intervention in the

domestic economy, promulgates materialism, consumerism, and commodification of many public goods" (p.1). The rise of neoliberalism provides an explanation for the rise of academic capitalism in higher education (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) and the precipitous decline in institutions that hold a liberal arts educational philosophy. Giroux and Giroux (2004) argue that the disappearance of students as citizens and the emergence of students as consumers allow continued support for policies that benefit the most elite. The authors contrast the citizen who is actively engaged in the world, concerned with the public good, and constructively challenging the status quo to the consumer who digests information without question. Giroux and Giroux argue these consumer students maintain a private "utopia" with the help of laptops, cell phones, and unlimited television channels and neglect their duty to participate as informed global citizens.

In general, the consumer mentality is characterized by an avoidance of issues and realities of the public sphere, aided by a media system that works to ensure that news is presented in a way that promotes the political and economic agenda of the wealthiest in society (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Thus, the content student consumer is disinterested in standing against the very governmental and corporate actions that undermine justice and equity in society. Consequently, economic and social class inequalities widen between the rich and the poor, and in the United States, the top 1% now possess as much wealth as the bottom 40% (Saunders, 2006).

The rise of consumers as opposed to citizens is a serious threat to democracy (Saunders, 2007). Giroux and Giroux (2004) assert that adopting a critical pedagogy

would heal the lack of critical questioning in our flawed educational system. A critical pedagogy supports democracy by educating students through dissent, the discussion of alternative realities, and active engagement with public issues (Hooks, 1994). Liberal arts education supports critical pedagogy, pushing public discourse in small settings. Students examine and defend assumptions on current issues (e.g., gender, race, and economic inequalities) and timely issues, such as the rights of the individual versus the needs of society (Canada, 1999).

As John Churchill—president of Phi Beta Kappa and the former provost of one of Pope's life changing colleges—put it, countercultural colleges are "places that are incubating the continuity of democratic values" (Pope, 2006, p. 3). Countercultural liberal arts colleges attract students who often want to challenge their own thinking in order to discover themselves (Hersh, 1999; Levy & Churchill, 1992). A culture of extensive student and faculty discourse and "learning for its own sake" allow for students to develop as active and informed citizens (Canada, 1999). Perhaps the rise of the student consumer and the decline in the number of institutions that practice liberal arts education exemplifies neoliberalism's powerful impact on higher education. Indeed, a consumer-oriented and materialistic mentality dominates the discourse and behaviors of many aspects of the United States and the rest of the world (Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Saunders, 2007). Liberal arts colleges offer hope for democracy as long as they can provide a critical form of education that develops citizens rather than consumers.

Competition. Perhaps because of the shift in demographics and changing educational ideologies (from a generalist to a career-based system), liberal arts colleges face increased competition for students and the accompanying resources to support them. Neely (1999) notes that competition in the educational marketplace poses perhaps the greatest threat to the uniqueness of liberal arts colleges, as colleges are having to demonstrate their ability to offer similar benefits as larger public institutions (e.g., more majors, classroom technology, career placement opportunities, distance instruction). Since the early 1980s, colleges and universities in all sectors have faced greater competition for financial resources as a consequence of declines in sources of public support and increased competition between higher education institutions for a limited population of traditional college students (McGuinness, 1999; Zusman, 1999). In response to the need to increase funding, many colleges and universities administrators have refocused attention away from traditional academic and internal matters into external planning and marketing efforts aimed at bolstering national visibility and institutional prestige (Alfred, 2006; Ramsey, 2006; Swenson, 1998). The marketing efforts reflect the commercialization of higher education and often succeed in attracting more applications and eventually enrollments from students who find the institutions brand or image compelling. However, students enticed by institutional marketing campaigns may find that their higher education experience fails to satisfy their expectations. So in the short run marketing may provide a boost in tuition revenue but in the long run institutions may lose if they do not provide students the educationally valuable experiences that they need to succeed.

In contrast to large research universities, few liberal arts colleges have national reputations or the marketing resources to garner the attention of media outlets (Graubard, 1999); the majority go unnoticed in a society preoccupied by bigness and non-academic accolades, like intercollegiate sports (Alfred, 2006). Hersh (1999) wondered how liberal arts colleges could gain public notice, given that these institutions enroll only 1% to 4% of America's college population, depending on the definition of a liberal arts college (Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997).

The quest for institutional prestige stems from greater competition between institutions for limited resources and the rising influence of mass media including the still questionable college rankings and guides, such as the yearly rankings published by *U.S. News and World Report* (Trainer, Trosset, & Sapp, 2000). Many scholars have debated the validity and utility of college rankings, yet few deny their ascendance as a *de facto* measure of public accountability (Carey, 2006). Critics have pointed out that the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings measure quality using the same yardstick to compare institutions with vastly different institutional missions, goals, and purposes (Brooks, 2005; Clarke, 2002). However, despite the efforts of a number of college and universities to establish alternative measures of institutional effectiveness (e.g., the University and College Accountability Network), rankings remain highly visible in the media and throughout society, as they provide the simplest way to present complex information.

Lesser-known liberal arts colleges have recently taken a stand with an organized movement against the *U.S. News and World Report* annual ranking of

colleges. In 2007, Lloyd Thacker of the Education Conservancy, a non-profit organization dedicated to reforming the college admissions process, started a movement criticizing the current college ranking practice. The *Beyond Ranking Letter* asked college presidents not to complete the reputational section of the *U.S. News* survey or to refer to rankings in any campus publication. The presidents of sixty-one institutions of higher education have signed the letter, with lesser-known liberal arts colleges representing most of the signatures (Thacker, 2007).

The *Beyond Ranking Letter* (2007) prompted the majority of presidents at the annual meeting of the Annapolis Group, a liberal arts education advocacy organization representing 125 liberal arts colleges, to support the boycott of peer-reputational ratings and the mention of *U.S. News* rankings in college publications. In addition, the Annapolis Group has worked with the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) and the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), to develop the University and College Accountability Network (UCAN), a web-based alternative to rankings. UCAN is designed as a resource for the public to obtain comprehensive data on colleges and universities, without imposing the inherent biases associated with hierarchical rankings (Annapolis Group, 2007). Consequently, the protest by this relatively small group of college presidents has garnered some media attention, but no change in the *U.S. News* ranking system, in which thousands of institutions continue to fully participate.

Despite the criticisms of the ranking system, institutions that appear at the top of *U.S. News and World Report*'s rankings obtain those rankings in part based on their

success at retaining and graduating students. Persistence offers an important indicator of institutional effectiveness, and colleges and universities should be rewarded for student success. However, these institutions often select the students who are most likely to persist and succeed in graduating (Pascarella et al., 2006). Thus, institutions that successfully retain and graduate academically and economically disadvantaged students do not garner as much attention as institutions that admit the best students and consequently have the highest graduation rates (Haycock, 2006). As a result, institutions that want to improve their rank may pursue programs that attract students with the greatest chance of success (e.g., honors colleges, merit based scholarships) to the detriment of disadvantaged students.

Moreover, greater competition between institutions has also compelled many colleges and universities to pursue similar strategies to gain recognition and stay afloat in the face of a society that places emphasis on prestige and wealth rather than educational quality and student development (Clarke, 2002; Ehrenburg, 2002). At many institutions, emphasis on revenue generation and business principles have changed the nature of the college presidency, faculty reward structures, student learning, and societal access to higher education (Neely, 1999). Furthermore, Carey's (2006) discussion of rankings highlights the impact of a commercially-oriented and consumer-driven model of higher education. He explains:

> Because today's rankings reward institutions for wealth, many college presidents are no longer national intellectual leaders but narrowly focused fundraisers in-chief. Because rankings reward institutions for their scholarly reputations, colleges recruit faculty who are distinguished in research even if their teaching skills are sub-par. Because the current rankings reward colleges for selective admissions and high SAT scores, more scholarships are going to

> wealthy, high-achieving applicants, instead of the lower-income students who need financial aid the most (pp.1-2).

Thus, accepting and actively participating in the commonly used ranking system can have far reaching implications for all levels of organizational structure within a college or university. College rankings need to consider the extent of development or growth that an institution produces from start to finish in their student body. If institutions bring in less-academically successful students they should be rewarded if upon graduation the percentage of students enrolling in graduate or professional school matches or surpasses a similar institution that admits only academically high-achieving students. The media and society fail to notice improvement as an important indicator of educational effectiveness.

Even outside of the small educational sector of the private liberal arts college, strong competition from other educational sectors has emerged (Breneman, 1994; Graubard, 1999). Specifically, many research and regional universities have recently added honors colleges that spend large amounts of money to market their small classes and provide generous financial aid packages for the recruitment of more academically gifted students (but not necessarily the most financially needy) to boost institutional prestige (Neely, 1999). Honors colleges provide a unique challenge to small liberal arts colleges, as honors colleges market themselves as having an academically rigorous curriculum in an environment that offers a wealth of personal attention, state of the art facilities, and the chance to do research with world renowned faculty (Stimpert, 2004). Although students who attend honors colleges at large research universities may receive some real opportunities, the curricular and environmental

structures of these universities will not be fully in line with the philosophy of liberal arts education so the learning outcomes may or may not be different. The research comparing the learning outcomes of liberal arts colleges and honors colleges is mostly anecdotal.

Currently, there are few research and regional universities that do not have an honors college offering full scholarships to an elite group of academically gifted students. The underlying assumption driving the popularity of honors colleges is that the value of a college degree is essentially the same regardless of institutional mission, and therefore a critical mass of high caliber students will enroll at any institution if granted enough money (Neely, 1999). Thus, it would seem that large public universities are at risk of compromising their mission of serving the people of the state by diverting inordinate resources to more academically (and often economically) elite students. In order to continue to attract academically elite students, less wealthy liberal arts colleges have been forced to choose between funding merit based or need based aid, often limiting the diversity of economic background. In sum, aggressive competition for students and an eroding sense of institutional mission across all sectors of higher education greatly impacts liberal arts colleges, especially those with less wealth and prestige (Breneman, 1994; Koblik, 1999).

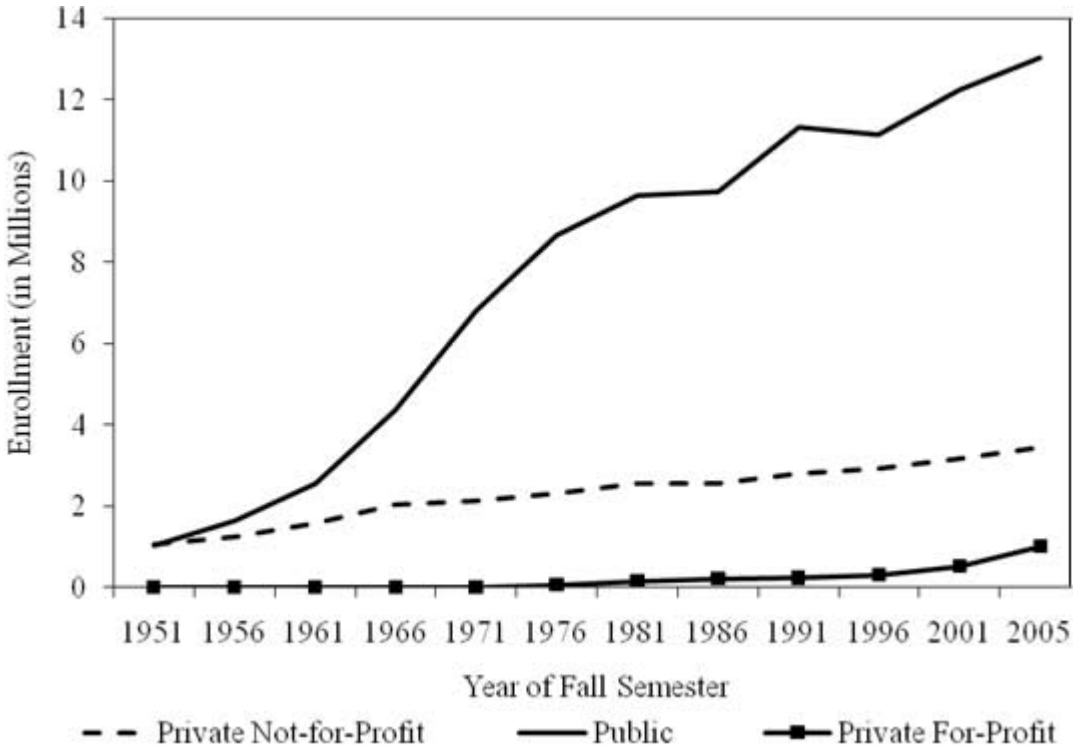
Despite their vast resources, even the wealthiest and most prestigious liberal arts colleges perceive the threat of new competition as a cause for concern. For example, after the Walton Foundation made a record 300 million dollar donation to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (for merit scholarships and the newly

established honors college), Paul Neely—a trustee at Williams College in Massachusetts—lamented "I am at the tail of a long line of thoughtful, devoted board members. They have had many concerns over the years, but surely none had to worry about competition from the University of Arkansas. We worry about such things now" (Neely, 1999, p. 28).

As noted above, public institutions are aggressively seeking to become the first choice for the highest achieving students, who graduate at the top of their high school class and who score in the 95th percentile on the SAT or ACT. Many public universities have a tradition of attracting quality students who excelled academically in high school and on standardized tests in addition to providing access to those who do not have the economic or educational advantages. For large public universities, size provides the visibility necessary to disperse the message to the brightest students that they offer special opportunities for them through honors courses, faculty research, study abroad, and merit scholarships that may cover the entire cost of attendance.

Public institutions began their ascendency as the primary providers of higher education during the 1950s. Prior to that time, private institutions enrolled the majority of college students. However, private institutions did not grow to meet the demand from the *Serviceman's Readjustment Act* of 1944, commonly referred to as the GI Bill. As illustrated in Figure 3, the enrollment gap between public and private institutions has grown dramatically since 1950.

Figure 3. Percentage of total undergraduate enrollment in the United States by public, non-profit and for profit private post secondary educational institutions since 1951.

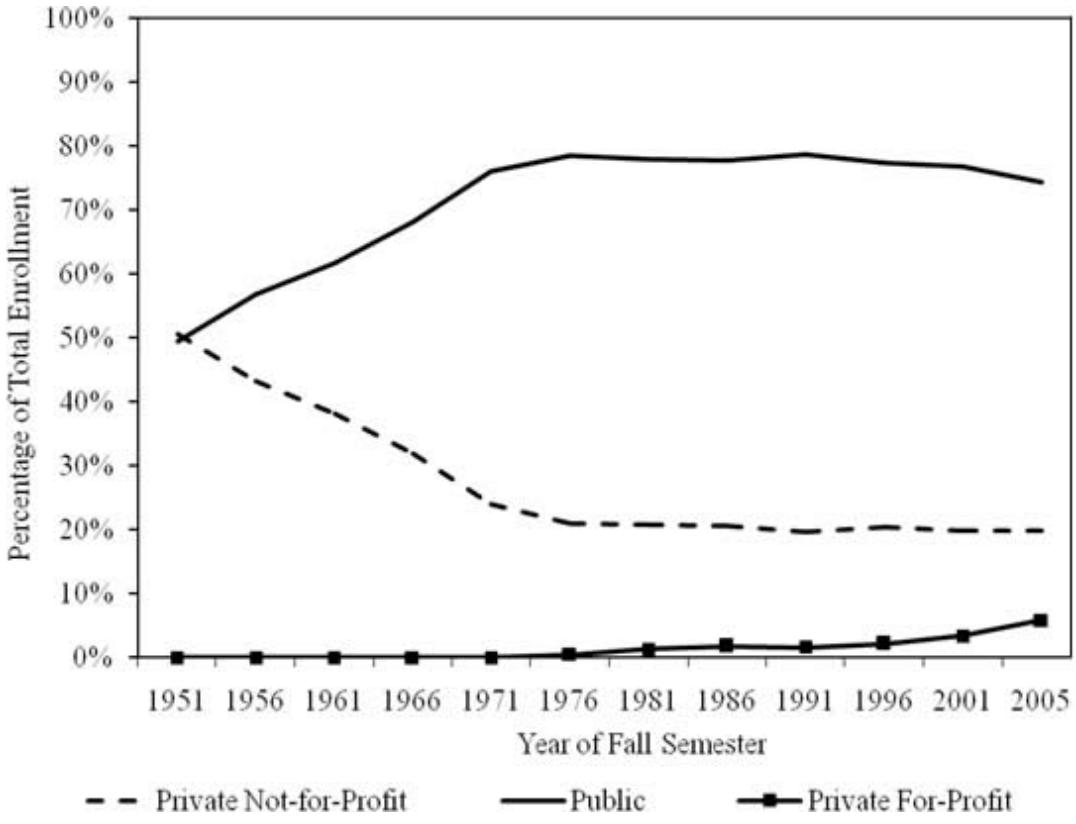


From "Table 175. Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions, by Attendance Status, Sex of Student, and Control of Institution: Selected Years, 1947 through 2005," by U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2006.

Since 1950, other federal aid programs (e.g., Higher Education Act of 1965) made education more accessible to middle and working class students, fueling the growth of public institutions even farther, until the demand for education subsided and enrollments stabilized during the 1980s (Lucas, 1994). Currently, private non-profit colleges and universities comprise less than 20% of the undergraduate enrollments

while the public share of higher education has dramatically increased over the last 60 years to around 75% (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Comparison of the marketshare (percentage) of total undergraduate enrollment in the United States for public, privite not-for-profit, and private for-profit post-secondary institutions since 1951.



From "Table 175. Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions, by Attendance Status, Sex of Student, and Control of Institution: Selected Years, 1947 through 2005," by U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2006.

In addition to competition from public universities, countercultural colleges also face a threat from wealthy private colleges and universities who are offering

greater financial incentives to attract high achieving middle and lower income students. This trend began with Harvard's December, 2007 announcement that students with families making less than $180,000 would be required to pay no more than 10% of the family's yearly income (Harvard University Gazette, 2007). Several other elite institutions (e.g., Stanford, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Yale, and Brown) quickly followed suit, offering greater financial incentives to middle and lower income students. Despite the obvious benefit for high-achieving students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, this trend places an even larger burden on lesser-known liberal arts colleges that do not have the financial resources to be able to offer similar aid packages. Thus, countercultural liberal arts colleges face a dual threat—on one end from large public universities' honors programs and on the other end from elite private liberal arts colleges. How can small private institutions, without large endowments or visibility, continue to sustain their enrollments and maintain their academic values as they face greater competition from other institutions?

Since the 1980s, countercultural colleges with small endowments (typically below $50 million) have struggled to maintain enrollments and remain financially viable. For example in the summer of 2007, the board overseeing Antioch College announced a plan to terminate operations after over a century of producing distinguished scholars and alumni. According to Pope (2006), "Antioch has produced a higher percentage of future scientists and scholars than any Ivy League institution except for Princeton" (p. 191). Moreover, Antioch has a 100% medical school acceptance rate in the past few years and they have as many MacArthur Fellows as

Princeton, despite having an 80% acceptance rate and not requiring standardized tests for admission (Pope, 2006).

In addition to its educational outcomes, Antioch College has a rich history of ingenuity and a focus on social justice issues in its mission. Horace Mann, the great educational reformer and "Father of American Public Education," served as the college's first president in 1853 (Rippa, 1997). The college has a history of supporting civil rights, as it appointed the first female faculty to earn the same rank and pay as her male counterparts and admitted African American students in the 1850s. In the 1920s, Arthur Morgan, a subsequent president, developed the nation's first college-wide required co-op plan, which remains a major aspect of the Antioch College curriculum. What distinguishes the Antioch curriculum from other institutions that require internships or co-ops is that students will spend at least one trimester each year working on a job. To supplement this experience, students are required to write an assessment of the quality of the work experience and complete independent study courses designed to relate theory and practice.

In addition to his visionary curricular addition of the co-op, Morgan exemplified Antioch's ideal of independence and self-reliance when he turned down an offer of 1% of General Motors Corporation's profits for fear that it would lead to the "wrong kind of influence" (Pope, 2006, p. 199). It would be unthinkable for a college president today (even at Antioch) to turn down such a large commitment of financial support in an era of fierce competition for resources within higher education.

So, how could such an outstanding institution, with such an accomplished history be forced to shut its doors? In the late 1960s and early 1970s Antioch began opening satellite graduate campuses in population centers across the country, using money from the original college to fund the expansion. Thus, Antioch College became one part of Antioch University in 1978. In the summer of 2007, the Antioch board of trustees announced that Antioch University, the institution's graduate and adult division, was financially stronger and would continue to operate in major cities around the country, despite the closing of the original college.

Only weeks after the decision to close, the board of this college in rural Ohio rescinded the decision to suspend operations at the original campus after the faculty of Antioch College threatened to sue the board over the firing of tenured faculty, in the hope of preventing board members from diverting funds from the original college to the university division. The alumni then began a fundraising campaign to raise millions of dollars to keep the college open. Initially, the board agreed to keep the college open as long as fundraising targets were met, and alumni amazingly managed to raise $18 million in six months. However, in late February 2008, the board reaffirmed its original plan to close operations at the main campus. The faculty have re-filed their lawsuit to prevent the board from closing the college, and the alumni continue negotiating with the board to allow Antioch College to become a free-standing liberal arts institution with its own board (Antioch College Alumni Association, 2008). If the alumni succeed in gaining the independence of Antioch

College from the rest of Antioch University, how will they begin to restore the college to its former glory?

Competitive Advantages of Countercultural Liberal Arts Colleges

Pope (1996, 2000, 2006) argued that a handful of lesser-known institutions in the American system of higher education do just as well or better than "name-brand" Ivy League and major research universities in developing students' personal skills, talents, self-confidence, and academic abilities. In addition to an institutional commitment to liberal arts education, these lesser-known colleges—described as "colleges that change lives"— achieve impressive outcomes not only for "A" students, but for students from a wide array of academic and economic backgrounds who have the motivation to learn. To study "value added" liberal arts colleges, Pope purposely selected forty lesser-known institutions that both accept motivated students from diverse academic backgrounds and simultaneously produced a higher proportion of alumni with successful outcomes (e.g., those who earned graduate and professional degrees) than more academically selective or prestigious institutions.

Pope (1996, 2000, 2006) then conducted numerous on-site interviews with administrators, faculty, students, and alumni to describe the characteristics that produced the high achievement in student outcomes at the forty countercultural colleges. He found the following five characteristics:

1. *Student-Faculty Interaction*. Faculty at life changing colleges had strong mentoring relationships with undergraduate students, as they worked closely together on scholarship (e.g., independent research).

2. *Collaborative Learning*. Students approach learning collaboratively rather than competitively.
3. *Active Learning*. Students are actively engaged in their own learning through major independent work or personalized academic programs.
4. *Critical Refection*. The environment fosters discussion of human ethics and values, both inside and outside of the classroom.
5. *Community of Scholars*. The institution promotes an environment of open expression and idea sharing between members of the college community.

Pope (2000) described these five characteristics of countercultural colleges as unique and antithetical to the undergraduate experience at major research universities, Ivy League institutions, or elite liberal arts colleges. The value of what he refers to as "colleges that change lives" stems from an environment that offers learners from diverse academic and economic backgrounds access to the richness of a traditional liberal arts education in a cooperative, rather than competitive, atmosphere. At highly selective, prestigious liberal arts colleges, students often compete with each other to be seen as the best. However, countercultural colleges value cooperative learning and discourage feelings of animosity and intellectual inadequacy. Whereas, students at elite liberal arts colleges may shy away from questions or comments that diminish their image as stellar students, the environment at countercultural colleges allows students to share their thoughts and seek clarifications, without fear of reprisal, all in an effort to develop their cognitive and affective development. Thus, Pope argues that

this creates a richer classroom learning experience and a safe environment to explore and develop.

Arguably, countercultural colleges provide a developmentally advantageous learning environment to students who could gain admission to more selective colleges and universities. However, perhaps more significantly, the countercultural college offers a quality learning experience for the many students who would not have been preferred candidates at more prestigious institutions, despite their motivation to learn. Given the demonstrated ability of these colleges to foster cognitive and affective development in students from a broad range of backgrounds, countercultural colleges in many ways deserve acclaim. But the consumer mentality that dominates the modern American value system equates resources received (e.g., endowments, academically elite incoming students, alumni salaries) with the quality of learning (Carey, 2006; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Thus, to a large extent the current higher education system reflects this consumer mentality by emphasizing the importance of developing and marketing institutional resources over devising better ways to educate students.

Astin (1999) viewed the commercialization of colleges and universities as "counterproductive" to the higher education system. He argues a better approach for institutions of higher education is to focus on talent development or value added development of the students. Specifically, how much do colleges add value or develop students is the more important question, not what these colleges have in terms of resources, particularly when resources are finite and beyond the control of institutions.

As mentioned in the previous section, liberal arts colleges in general face a number of external challenges (i.e., demographic shifts, a greater focus on career-specific education, and competition for students and resources). Perhaps to an even greater degree, countercultural colleges face these same challenges even if those institutions seek to find an appropriate response within the philosophy of liberal arts education rather than academic capitalism. However, the smaller endowments and lack of national visibility at many of these unique institutions generates immense pressure to cater to market forces in more commercially-oriented ways in order to recruit students and secure resources. In an attempt to entice potential students, these countercultural colleges may alter institutional priorities and practices to enhance their consumer appeal relative to highly visible research universities (Ramsey, 2006). Given that colleges and universities are rewarded for their wealth, fame, and exclusivity (Carey, 2006), these institutions may attempt to cater to societal and systematic trends by focusing on prestige, rather than substance.

Institutional Theory

Due to societal changes I have discussed, countercultural colleges have felt pressure to respond to challenges, such as competition for students, resources, or prestige. According to Bastedo (2006), *institutional theory* suggests that organizations are constantly pressured to emulate the practices of their competitors in order for them to survive. Therefore, it appears that external challenges may necessitate that countercultural colleges conform to higher education industry's values of wealth, fame, and exclusivity (Carey, 2006). Consequently, deviations or uniqueness in

organizational practices from systematic values will likely result in a loss of legitimacy, perceived quality, and a higher probability of institutional failure (Monks & Ehrenberg, 1999, Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 2001). In contrast, critics of institutional theory argue that there is an exception to the risk of failure from non-conformity brought about when strong institutional cultures market their deviations from industry norms as a unique brand (Kondra & Hinings, 1998; Toma, Dubrow, & Hartly, 2005). It is unclear as to whether countercultural colleges are responding to institutional theory through isomorphism (industry-level forces leading colleges to homogenization in values, structure, and processes) or if countercultural colleges are succeeding by branding themselves as unique in an effort to compete in the higher education market.

"Branding" is a strategy originally developed to market for-profit organizations interested in achieving a distinct advantage or position over competitors in a particular industry (Porter, 1998). Recently in higher education, there has been great interest in applying this marketing concept as a means of aggressively competing with other institutions (Moore, 2004; Pulley, 2003). Since the late 1990s, selective liberal arts colleges have adopted branding as a competitive strategy to enhance their visibility and prestige. These marketing strategies began to evolve during the recession of the 1980s when many liberal arts colleges needed to convince a career-minded society that a liberal arts education provided a useful preparation for high-paying jobs (Breneman, 1994).

Branding forces institutions to identify what is distinctive about their institutions, in order to market the perceived benefits of their product (Alfred, 2006), and the most successful institutions have been able to market themselves as distinct from other institutions with similar missions, curricular offerings, and organizational structures (Hartly, 2002; Ramsey, 2006). However, many other colleges have adopted the business practice of "benchmarking," emulating nearly everything, including programs, curricula, and organizational structure of perceived successful institutions. Thus, the strategy of benchmarking has become an increasing part of the internal decision-making processes, aiding in the emulation of higher-ranked institutions (Epper, 1999).

Benchmarking has greatly contributed to institutional homogenization and reduced the diversity between colleges and universities in their programs, policies, and learning cultures (Hutchinson, 2005). Furthermore, institutional theory suggests that organizations respond to times of uncertainty by making adjustments to be more like other similarly focused organizations considered to be more successful (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). In this case, a college or university will undergo this process of homogenization either because it perceives this as a way to become more competitive or because it believes institutional alignment will help it gain prestige and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

In the face of fierce competition with other institutions, liberal arts colleges often experience institutional uncertainty, especially as they depend on tuition revenues from their students (Breneman, 1994). In the face of this uncertainty, liberal

arts colleges confront real and perceived risks associated with supporting unique practices that may not be rewarded by the values of the current consumer-driven model of higher education. For example, a study by Monks and Ehrenberg (1999) of the top 100 private universities and liberal arts colleges found that decreases in the *U.S. News* college rankings were correlated with a decline in the number of admissions applications the following year, which also led the institution to devote additional institutional resources to financial aid to attract a sufficient number of students.

As liberal arts colleges use the same strategies to attain prestige and selectivity, the diversity of the overall education system and options for the average college-bound student diminish. Historically, the diversity of institutions and educational missions has been noted as a major reason for the prestige of the American system of higher education abroad (Altbach 1999, Ehrenburg, 2002). A highly diverse higher education system provides a variety of postsecondary learning experiences to all members of society, regardless of socioeconomic status. Consequently, a competitive system that rewards only wealth, fame, and exclusivity of institutions ultimately threatens the role of the higher education as "the great social equalizer" (Hagedorn & Tierney 2002; Haycock, 2006).

One example of homogenization in the face of external threats is colleges' and universities' use of the "high tuition/high aid" pricing model. With limited information, seekers of higher education often perceive the quality of an education by how much it costs (Alfred, 2006), and therefore many institutions over the last two

decades have increased their tuition to increase their prestige. However, the growing complexity of financial aid conceals the real cost that students typically pay at an institution. In adopting a high tuition/high aid pricing model, colleges increase their tuition rate to suggest the institution is worth more than other institutions with lower tuition rates. However, the institutions supplement the high tuition rates with more generous financial aid packages to entice students to attend. In the end, an institution with higher tuition may actually cost less than an institution with a lower stated tuition. On the positive side, such practices allow institutions to seek revenues and enrollments by leveraging financial aid, awarding more merit aid to students who are less likely to attend their institutions and less aid to students who are most likely to attend.

However, this high tuition/high aid strategy has several negative implications as well. First, because potential students do not know the "net cost" of attendance until they have applied, gotten admitted, and gone through the elaborate and often confusing financial aid system, this may make decisions about where to apply more difficult. Furthermore, when the stated tuition is high, a powerful perception can form, especially among first generation and low-income high school students that the price of a private college education is out reach or not an option for them (Moore, 2004). For many potential applicants, the published tuition rate is most salient, and it is difficult to convince applicants from low income households that they will be able to afford the cost of attending a high tuition private college. Perhaps this lack of communication about tuition discounting has led to a decline in the percentage of low-

income students attending private colleges and universities (Davis, 2003; Selingo & Brainard, 2006). Moreover, the shift to a high tuition/high aid model has surpassed the ability of the federal aid programs to satisfy the financial need of many students and has contributed to greater reliance on loans in financial aid packages—a move which has contributed to dramatic increase in student debt (Hauptman, 1998; Hearn, 1998).

The cost of attending certain colleges and universities has become prohibitive for many low and middle income Americans. In 2006, the Advisory Committee on Student Financial (ACSFA) reported that financial barriers have prevented between 1 million and 1.6 million qualified high school graduates, particularly those from low and moderate-income families from earning a bachelor's degree. Limited access to higher education exacerbates the problem of a lack of social mobility and income inequities between those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, given the power of educational access to help mitigate these social ills. Furthermore, the ACSFA (2006) issued a "dire warning" that the lack of access for lower and middle income students to a four-year education also hinders the ability of the U.S. to maintain its technological, political, and economic standing in the world.

Evidence of the weakening of the U.S. higher education system internationally has recently been noted in a series of reports. The most recent *Measuring Up Report* (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006) found that the U.S. population under age 35 ranked fourteenth in world in the percentage who earned a college degree, whereas the U.S. population over age 35 ranked second in the world.

Because scholars regard the diversity of the American higher education system as a major contributor to its acclaim and reputation for superior educational quality around the world (Altbach, 1999; Ehrenburg, 2002), the U.S. must avoid homogenization of higher education to maintain its economic and technological supremacy (Callan, 2006; Rendon & Hope, 1999).

To retain the diversity of the American higher education system countercultural liberal arts colleges must retain diversity both within the category of liberal arts colleges as well as among all higher education institutions. The former requires countercultural liberal arts colleges to remain distinguishable from elite liberal arts colleges by differing in areas, such as institutional culture and organizational practice. The latter type of diversity necessitates that all types of liberal arts colleges continue to differ from other types of institutions, such as research universities, regional four-year comprehensive colleges, and community colleges. What are countercultural liberal arts colleges doing to preserve the diversity of American higher education?

Organizational Change

In order to understand how the rate and process of change may contribute to institutional isomorphism, I expound below on the organizational change literature. Charles Darwin in the classic scientific work the *Origin of the Species* (1859) popularized the theory of natural selection. Every living organism, including, plants, animals, and human beings survived because of successful change and adaptation to the physical environment. An organism's inability to change or adapt to the

environment causes the organism to be selected against, and thus fail to survive and pass on genes to the next generation (Darwin, 1859/1985). Organizations, like organisms in the natural world, require change and adaptation in order to continue to survive in an economic environment based on "survival of the fittest." In the rapidly changing global environment, organizations must continuously implement change and innovation to achieve survival in the long-term (Senge, 1990).

Quinn and Weick (1999) describe two forms of organizational change: episodic and continuous. They characterize episodic change as rapid transformation followed by periods of stability or equilibrium. Episodic change is dramatic and a reaction of the organization's failure to adapt to the external environment. Conversely, continuous change represents an endless series of incremental modifications in response to daily organizational uncertainties. Continuous change leads to organizational transformation over time as numerous accommodations join together. The continuous perspective focuses on long-term adaptability, while episodic change concerns organizational survival in the short-term.

Quinn and Weick's notions of change derive primarily from Lewin's (1951) force field theory and Senge's learning organization model. Lewin describes change in episodic terms, stemming largely from external threats to the immediate survival of an organization. In contrast, Senge (1990) posits that successful organizations are constantly in a process of anticipation of future external demands. The learning organization allows for incremental innovation through a healthy level of creative tension between an organization's present state and where it aspires to be in a future

time in a different external environment. Thus, Senge's concept of a learning organization parallels the notion of continuous change, given its emphasis on improvisation, learning, and translation. In the following paragraphs, I outline each of these theories.

Early change management theories described the typical pattern of events from the beginning of change to the end of change. Lewin (1951) described change as episodic containing three phases: (1) unfreezing, (2) transitioning, and (3) refreezing. Unfreezing occurs when people realize that current practices are no longer effective for organizational success. In unfreezing, the need for change may be actualized through some kind of crisis that threatens the survival of the organization or some kind of predicted environmental threat, which may not yet be evident to most members in the organization (Quinn & Weick, 1999). After realizing the need to change, key decision-makers attempt to develop new attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors that address perceived organizational shortcomings or inadequacies. Once resisting forces to change have been investigated, understood, and minimized, "transitioning" leads to a reforming of institutional practices to address the necessary concerns. Following this diagnosis of the problem and the creation of a plan to address the specific organizational threats, the leadership of the organization is ready to implement the change plan in a way that will lead to a lasting realization of the change objectives. Lewin (1951) termed this final stage "refreezing," given his assertion that members of the organization return to a stable but enhanced state of being after the successful implementation of the change plan. Lewin's theory relates to episodic changes

provided that organizations have periods of stability where the need for change needs to be recognized. In contrast, continuous change does not suggest periods where change is absent rather innovation and anticipation never cease.

Although many theories incorporate the essential elements of Lewin's force field theory—i.e., recognizing the need for change, planning, and implementing—many believe Lewin's notion of change to be anachronistic in today's rapidly changing and information-driven economic environment (Curry, 1992; Quinn & Weick, 1999). Instead, Senge (1990) suggests that truly successful organizational change operates gradually over time and recruits the help of many to identify and address institutional concerns.

By implementing continuous changes, organizations can avoid upsetting the balance and practices of the organizational culture. Minimal changes often incur low levels of resistance and provide an effective strategy for the development of trust among skeptics (Pope, 2004). Moreover, these small, gradual changes set the groundwork for executing larger scale transitions and innovations (Rowley & Sherman, 2001). Senge (1990) uses the term "learning organizations" to describe organizations that take an inclusive, collegial approach to continuously adapting and developing over time. Learning organizations open themselves to change as a continuous process that involves communication and creative thinking at all levels of the organization (Fritz, 1991).

According to Senge (1990), learning organizations possess a competitive advantage as they have the ability to learn and adapt to the technologically-driven

global economy better than organizations which delay change until it becomes necessary for survival. In addition, learning organizations continuously ponder ways to incorporate new innovations into their organizational structures. Even while an organization achieves a strong market position and satisfies strategic objectives, the anticipation of future organization modifications aids in the continuation of the institution's competitive advantage. To accomplish this, learning organizations depend on experimentation, feedback, and the ability to engage in generative learning (i.e., changing to meet the future needs of consumers) (Senge, 1990).

Moreover, leadership in a learning organization requires the development of creative tension. Fritz (1991) defines creative tension as the gap between current reality and the shared vision of the organization. To reduce this gap, organizations can either lower their expectations for their future vision or work to deal with the current reality. Learning organizations take the latter strategy. In higher education organizations, creative tension often exists in the area of academic standards or financial stability. For countercultural liberal arts colleges, financial instability may lead to tensions between faculty and administration over academic standards particularly if the proposed remedy does not support the philosophy of liberal arts education. Perhaps more so than in large universities, the future functioning of liberal arts colleges often rests on the ability of various constituencies to work toward innovations (Meyerson & Johnson, 1993; Shinn, 2004).

The traditional shared governance model of higher education in general, and at small liberal arts colleges in particular, offers an environment particularly conducive

to the learning organization model (Stimpert, 2004). Within higher education institutions, effective shared governance means that institutional stakeholders work toward a similar vision for the institution (Shinn, 2004). However, because many higher education institutions implement changes and innovations in the face of institutional crisis, such as declining student enrollments (Woodard, Love, & Komives, 2000), some organizations will forgo the benefits of practicing as a learning organization. A number of educational scholars argue that long lasting changes only occur when trustees, faculty, administrators, and students govern and work together as a cohesive group (Birnbaum, 2004, Pope, 2004; Shinn, 2004). However, many organizations continue to enact short-term changes that may ultimately undermine their long-term mission-driven goals (Hartley, 2002). Consequently, the issue of whether a change occurs over the short-term or long-term does not seem as relevant as how "strategic" the organization is in dealing with its own unique issues and problems.

Although continuous changes offer a good solution to long-term challenges, episodic changes may be necessary to quickly and dramatically address immediate real world realities. Therefore, debate exists over whether episodic, continuous, or a combination of both forms of change best allows institutions to transform and thrive (Quinn & Weick, 1999). Given that many countercultural colleges face greater external threats from competition and consumerism, decision-makers may be inclined to pursue episodic change in an attempt to raise revenues and attract students. Episodic change often requires strong, charismatic leadership and the support of key

members in the organization, whereas continuous change often enlists the support of the wider institutional community in the decision-making process (Yukl, 2005). Thus, in higher educational institutions, although administrators generally spearhead episodic change, continuous changes often emerge through a wider partnership of faculty, administrators, and students (Curry, 1992).

Given that small liberal arts colleges have fewer bureaucratic controls than at large research universities, one might expect a greater propensity toward episodic change, as less bureaucracy should allow for less resistance to immediate change. However, resistance to immediate change often surfaces when faculty and trustees hold different visions for the institution and are unwilling to collaborate, forcing administrators to mediate the conflict (Meyerson & Johnson, 1993; Shinn, 2004). In small liberal arts colleges, just as in other organizations, the implementation of a change plan often faces the difficult necessity of modifying the organizational culture (Bergquist, 1992; Yukl, 2005). It is important to determine the people affected by the change, where the resistance to the change will resonate, and the ability of the organization to change (Rowley & Sherman, 2001). In traditional liberal arts colleges or other educational organizations with strong elements of decentralization, meaningful change occurs only through the building of trust between the faculty, administration, and trustees (Meyerson & Johnson, 1993; Pope, 2004).

Because highly selective liberal arts colleges remain more sheltered from the forces of competition and careerism than many countercultural colleges, they may be less inclined to implement episodic change, given that these top liberal arts colleges

can afford the time and resources necessary to make small incremental changes. However, for countercultural colleges, the current demands of the higher education industry may require dramatic change to ensure survival. Despite the external challenges that may necessitate episodic change, countercultural colleges face an equally important challenge of maintaining their unique liberal arts education mission. Thus, any attempt to address these dual concerns over the long term will likely require innovative continuous change. In the following chapter, I present my methodology for the current investigation. Ultimately, I hope to illuminate the process of institutional change at two particular countercultural colleges and how it has impacted their ability to fulfill their institutional mission.

Chapter Two Summary

After examining the literature, it is clear that countercultural liberal arts colleges offer a unique educational benefit to students and society. Despite the fact that these colleges often do not possess the prestige and resources of more elite liberal arts colleges, they serve as an invaluable source of diversity in the American higher education system, as they provide a transformational liberal arts education to students with less than perfect academic backgrounds.

Due to an aggressively competitive higher educational system that values wealth, fame, and exclusivity, liberal arts colleges in general, and countercultural institutions more specifically, face an uncertain future (Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997; Driver, 2007; Jonsen, 1984; McPhereson & Schaprio, 1999). Koblik (1999) noted that liberal arts colleges face the threat of "dominance of the large universities,

increased specialization of the professoriate, the creation of a highly competitive national market for higher education, the economics of the education sector, and a growing public demand for vocational training rather than preparing youth for lives that will be satisfying, [both] professionally and intellectually" (p. XIV). Strategies of institutional change aimed at addressing these challenges may ultimately limit these institutions' ability to fulfill their unique institutional mission of transforming students. Thus, in the following section, I elaborate on my methodology for exploring what strategies internal stakeholders at two countercultural liberal arts colleges see as necessary for their institution to remain viable in a higher education system dominated by a commercially-driven model.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

Prior scholarship on countercultural liberal arts colleges provides little insight into the external challenges facing these unique institutions and the pressure to emulate more conventional institutions. As noted earlier, the uniqueness of a liberal arts education has led to exceptional learning outcomes for its students (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pope, 1996, 2000, 2006). Thus, the current environment of competition and prestige-seeking becomes problematic if it leads to greater institutional isomorphism (Bastedo, 2006; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 2001), reducing the ethos of liberal arts education at historically countercultural colleges (Delucchi, 1997). In order to study the multiple complexities of this research problem as it develops, I have applied a qualitative approach, using a descriptive case study design (Merriam, 1998).

In the current investigation, I examine the unique context of two countercultural liberal arts colleges and describe their reactions to the dynamic forces of institutional competition and student careerism in higher education today. Furthermore, the current work explores the implications of these threats on both the future of liberal arts education at these specific institutions and in the American higher education system in general. In selecting the institutions for study, I specifically targeted two colleges that place a high value on liberal arts education, yet simultaneously face the possibility of internal and external pressures to emulate more conventional colleges.

In order to triangulate and capture fully the diversity of viewpoints within these institutions, I interviewed administrators, faculty, and students. By including a diverse sample of participants, I increased the trustworthiness of the data and extracted a richer understanding of the complex and multifaceted issues associated with practicing liberal arts education in the early twenty-first century (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2002). Moreover, I used an emergent design, which allowed for theory building throughout the research process (Glesne, 2006). Thus, I was able to explore the dynamic process of how people at different levels of an institution perceive and respond to institutional change. Although my investigation largely relies on one-on-one interviews—as suggested by Merriam's (1998) *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*—I also utilized alternative data sources, including observations, historical documents, mission statements, and marketing information to form a richer understanding of the institutional context.

Research Questions

Earlier, I posed three primary questions that the current investigation examines. They were:

1. What ideals do faculty, administrators, and students at countercultural liberal arts colleges hold for their institutions?
2. How do internal stakeholders identify and perceive organizational change?
3. How do students, faculty, and administrators identify and address the threats facing countercultural liberal arts colleges?

In what follows, these questions become an overarching framework for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data, including the development of my own model for evaluating organizational change.

Site Selection

A number of factors were taken into consideration in selecting the sites for this research project. Given that the focus of this study centered on lesser-known institutions of higher education that practice the values of liberal arts education, I began by examining the liberal arts colleges highlighted in the book *Colleges that Change Lives* (Pope, 1996, 2000, 2006). Although many colleges not included in Pope's work fit the criteria of being countercultural, "life-changing" colleges, the extensive case studies he provides highlight how each of these institutions fit the criteria of being "life changing." Therefore, using these forty colleges as a starting point provided a pragmatic approach to selecting institutions. Pope's "life-changing" colleges all provide liberal arts education to students who might not be admitted into more prestigious, wealthy, and highly-selective liberal arts colleges. Although ironic, given the best-selling status of Pope's books on lesser-known colleges, most of the colleges profiled (e.g., Guilford College, Millsaps College) still lack the visibility of more elite liberal arts colleges (e.g., Vassar College, Amherst College). Thus, Pope's book narrowed my search to a group of colleges that were educationally effective, yet little-known gems of liberal arts education.

Among these forty colleges, I looked for institutions that had smaller endowments and were located in a geographic region with the greatest concentration

of elite liberal arts colleges and large research universities. I also sought institutions with curricular and organizational structures that did not conform to common practices at conventional colleges and universities. I made every effort to select colleges that had perhaps the strongest tradition of contradicting the norms of the higher education industry, as these colleges may have the greatest tension between their institutional practices and the wider trends in society.

The Northeast region contains the largest number of highly-selective research universities and well-endowed small private colleges in the nation. In addition to challenges from these private institutions, they also face threats from competitive public institutions that offer personalized attention to undergraduates through well-funded honors programs and consortia agreements with prestigious small colleges (e.g., the Five College Consortium of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Smith, Mount Holyoke, and Hampshire). In addition, demographic trends, such as, a declining number of high school graduates in New England over the next decade (see Figure 2) coupled with a decreased preference for full-time, residential college education, threaten future enrollments at these tuition dependent colleges (Jonsen, 1984; McPherson & Schapiro, 1999; Wenzlau, 1983).

In the face of all these threats I selected two colleges that recently decided to no longer participate in the *US News and World Report* college rankings reputational survey (Thacker, 2007). Perhaps the boycott of rankings that reward wealth, visibility, and selectivity (Carey, 2006) is an example of a strategy that these colleges are using

to resist consumerism and to affirm the importance and significance of a liberal arts education.

The two colleges that I selected have a tradition of curricular and organizational divergence from the norms of higher education. Each college opened after the Second World War, in an effort to experiment and reform the practice of undergraduate education. Both institutions abandoned traditional academic structures, such as discipline oriented academic departments, in favor of more interdisciplinary faculty and curricular organizations. Finally, at both colleges, students do not choose a major from a catalog; instead, students take responsibility for developing their own academic programs. Neither college has predetermined majors which is pretty unique to most institutions even among liberal arts colleges.

In order to maintain the anonymity of my participants, I use a pseudonym for each of the colleges included in my study, referring to them as "Apple College" and "Maple College." The institutions I selected possess many similarities: both colleges are located in rural areas in the Northeastern United States, comprise primarily residential student bodies, and have relatively low enrollments (approximately 1500 and 500 students at Apple and Maple, respectively) and smaller endowments (below $50 million). Moreover, the case institutions lacked the longevity, visibility, wealth, and prestige garnered by many competing higher education institutions in their regional vicinity.

At Maple College, student academic responsibility takes the form of a concentration (i.e. set of courses across disciplines that have a relationship) that culminates with the development of a plan or independent project. The plan is a major independent project that encompasses the entire senior year. When students are "on plan" they are often not enrolled in courses on campus, but out in the field conducting their independent work and/or in one-on-one tutorials with faculty. The students' plans must be proposed to their faculty advisors, and once completed they are evaluated by their advisors and external experts in the students' subject matter. The plan uniquely takes place outside traditional course work and requires the evaluation of an outside expert.

At Apple, first-year students must form a committee of two faculty members, who will evaluate their proposed course of study, which includes courses, internships, and possibly co-curricular activities. Students must engage in a course of study that answer an interdisciplinary question or questions and culminate in a year-long independent research project. Apple College continues to use narrative evaluations, as opposed to letter grades, to evaluate students. The founding faculty of Apple initiated narrative evaluations as a departure from the limitations of evaluating student work with letters grades (i.e., A, B, C, D, and F). Specifically, there are no credit hours assigned to courses, nor are there letter grades awarded on a transcript. Progress toward a degree at Apple is measured in three stages broken into three divisions where the faculty review the portfolios of students according to learning outcomes established by a committee of faculty. Portfolios include student reflections on their

learning, faculty narrative course evaluations, and samples of student work. Apple's labor-intensive practice of narrative evaluation and portfolio review remains fairly distinctive in higher education today as it was when the college first opened.

Participants

The participants (N=39) include a diverse sample of administrators, faculty, and students from the two colleges. Roughly the same number participated from each site with 21 from Apple College and 18 from Maple College. Of the participants, 20 were female and 19 were male, 7 were members of the administration, 17 were on the faculty, and 15 were students.

I employed purposeful sampling techniques in order to maximize the diversity of participant perspectives from each college. This required careful attention to the recruitment of faculty, administrators, and students at each site.

Faculty. Maple College has less than 50 full-time faculty members, and therefore to achieve the most diverse sample of experience, disciplines, and demographic characteristics, I sent an invitation to all members of the faculty. From this invitation, 11 faculty (around one-quarter of the total faculty) responded, but only 7 were able to participate on the days that I scheduled on-campus interviews. In contrast, Apple College has twice the number of faculty as Maple College. Thus, I employed a targeted approach to sampling by asking my research contact at Apple to recommend faculty from across different disciplines and academic ranks to participate. I then sent each of the recommended faculty members an invitation to participate through email. Of the nine Apple faculty that were initially invited, five responded but

only three agreed to participate. To diversify my faculty participants from Apple, I examined the online biographies of Apple faculty to determine who varied from the current participants on a combination of the following: academic discipline, seniority, demographic characteristics, and research interests in social problems that could apply to education. From the second recruitment list, 25 were then invited to participate. Of this group, 7 more agreed to participate, bringing the total number of faculty participants at Apple to 10.

Of the 17 faculty who participated between Apple and Maple, 6 were female and 11 were male. Faculty participants had between 1 and 38 years of experience at the case institutions, and two of the faculty members were academic deans. The faculty who participated at both sites represented the three major curricular areas of a traditional liberal arts college: the humanities (e.g., creative writing, film, and modern languages), social sciences (e.g., political theory, history, and sociology), and the natural sciences (e.g., biochemistry, astronomy, and cognitive science), despite the fact that neither college organizes itself in this traditional discipline-based academic structure.

According to Mertens (2005), maximum variation sampling allows for the revelation of both commonly held and unique points of view within the population. In addition to the wide range of disciplinary perspectives, the faculty participants in the current study range in seniority as well. I anticipated that the senior faculty members could provide rich perspectives on their institution's history, and junior faculty could speak to the changing dynamics of the balance of scholarship and teaching obligations

(Zusman, 1999). Given the diversity in gender, seniority, and discipline, I believe maximum variation was achieved in the faculty sample.

Administrators. In order to recruit the administrators at each college who had the most influence on institutional decision-making, I sent the same e-mail invitation that I had sent to faculty to a select group of administrators. For each college, I sent an initial request to the president, the most senior academic officer, the most senior student affairs officer, and the most senior enrollment officer. At both colleges, the senior academic officers also served as tenured members of the faculty. Although their viewpoints reflect a dual role as both faculty and administrator, I am including them for numeric and analytic purposes as administrators as opposed to faculty.

At Maple College, all the senior administrators invited to participate agreed to an interview; however the president was unavailable for a campus interview at the time of my visit. Thus, I interviewed the remaining three administrators at Maple College. At Apple College, the president, the most senior academic officer, and the most senior enrollment officer agreed to participate, but the most senior student affairs officer declined. I then sent an invitation to the director of institutional research, who agreed to an interview. Thus, overall my recruitment methods achieved a critical-case sample of participants (Patton, 2002), given that the president, senior academic affairs, student affairs, and enrollment management represent critical cases at a small college —i.e., they are particularly important to the leadership and future planning of the institution. Across the two colleges, four of the administrators were men and three were women, and their experience ranged from 1 to 36 years.

Students. Using the same recruitment material that I had used with faculty and administrators, I emailed all students at the college to invite them to participate in a single 45 to 60 minute one-on-one interview. The resultant sample of 15 students varied in terms of class year, race, sex, U.S. citizenship, and disability status (physical or mental). Student participants ranged from 18 to 26 years of age and represented all years of traditional undergraduate study (i.e. first-year through senior year). Four of the student participants were male and eleven were female. Two of the participants were African American, one was Asian American, and the rest of the students were Caucasian. Two participants were international students (one from Finland and one from the Czech Republic). In addition, one student identified as having both learning and physical disabilities.

Procedures

Prior to recruiting the study's participants, I sent an email to the presidents at Apple and Maple colleges requesting consent to conduct research on the topic of challenges to liberal arts education at their respective institutions (see Appendix A). Through correspondence, the presidents learned the purpose of the study, as well as my desire to interview administrators, faculty, and students on campus during the next academic year. I also informed the relevant individuals at each institution that their participation would be kept confidential, through the use of institutional pseudonyms. Both college presidents expressed support and directed my request to a faculty member in charge of research, who then communicated the institutional procedures for conducting research. The on-site research contacts at each college then reviewed my

research proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Oklahoma, and provided written correspondence in support of my proposal (see Appendices B, and C).

Once the research proposal was approved by the IRB, I sent a copy of the approved letter to the research contact at the site institutions for their review (see Appendix D). The site contacts provided suggestions about how to recruit faculty, students, and administrators and made suggestions for when to schedule campus visits to conduct interviews. The participant recruitment process began during the first month of the 2007-2008 academic year. To ensure consistency, I contacted faculty, administrators, and students using the same recruitment email (see Appendix E). The email invited them to partake in a 45 to 60 minute on-campus, one-on-one, semi-structured interview during the month of October. Participants were also informed that they would be sent an electronic copy of the final study via email to allow them to examine the analyses and verify the accuracy of my depiction of their comments. I also offered to supply each institution with a hard copy of this research for their archives.

Data Collection

Once a faculty, administrator, or student agreed to participate, I sent them a scheduling e-mail, which asked them to select the location for their on-campus interview and choose one of the available times (see Appendix F). Primarily, students decided to be interviewed in the student center, while a few chose academic buildings, the cafeteria, or a residence hall. Faculty and administrators tended to schedule their

interviews at their campus offices. The scheduling e-mail also contained more information about the study, as well as an electronic copy of the informed consent form. I also informed participants prior to the interview that they could request an advanced copy of the structured questions that would be asked at their interview.

I began each interview by providing the participant with a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix G), which varied slightly with inclusion of an on-campus research contact at Maple College. Prior to the interview, I explained to participants some of the key components of the informed consent, such as, confidentiality and anonymity of their participation as well as the right not to answer a question or discontinue participation at any time. I then asked them to read and sign the consent form, which included a request for permission to audio record the interview.

The rights of human participants were adhered to throughout the research process. I strictly adhered to the research protocol approved by the University of Oklahoma Office of Human Research Participant Protection. I also adhered to the three main principles of the National Research Act of 1974, by ensuring 1) protection of human subjects from harm (physical and/or emotional), 2) providing research participants with information on the purpose of the research as well as discussing the voluntary nature of their participation, and 3) respect for privacy through the use of pseudonyms for participants and secure storage and disposal of research data (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002; National Commission for the Protection of Human

Subjects, 1979). I also used pseudonyms for the names of institutional sites to further protect participants' anonymity.

I began each interview by trying to get to know my participants. I asked them a about their background and their professional and personal interests. A number of researchers note the importance of developing rapport with participants in case study research (Merriam, 1998; Spradley, 1979; Stake, 1995). Then, I proceeded to ask each participant the same structured questions. However, to aid in the flow of the interview, I changed the order of the questions based on the responses given and the need for unstructured follow-up questions (Merriam, 1998). At the end of each interview, I thanked the participant and reminded them that I would contact them again to provide an opportunity to verify and clarifying comments that they made in their interview. From each interview, a full transcription was completed to allow for more thorough data analysis and interpretation.

Measures

Creswell (1998) noted that data collection in case study requires multiple sources of data in order to adequately describe the case and place it in a context bounded by time and place. The current study utilized data collected through researcher field notes, institutional documents, and participant interviews.

Documents. I gathered a number of institutional documents, including presidential speeches, recruitment materials, and founding documents from each college's website. I examined the extent to which institutional documents focus on institutional values, change, and challenges. Documents often represent the

institution's overt marketing and communication to the external environment and can be used to support or contradict the information gathered from interviews and observations.

Field Notes. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I reflected upon my perceptions, assumptions, and working hypotheses in a journal. I refined and developed my interpretations of the data based upon a process of continuous reflection and modification until a framework for understanding and presenting the data emerged. Schwandt (2001) argues that field notes will aid in the on-going analysis of the data, as it accumulates and confront researcher biases and assumptions.

Interviews. The primary data source for this study is one-on-one interviews with a diverse sample of internal campus stakeholders. A number of qualitative researchers note the necessary primacy of interview data in case study research (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995). A major source of trustworthiness in this research is the triangulation of interview data among different faculty, administrators, and students. Therefore, it was essential to develop a consistent set of questions that would still allow for a wide range of perspectives to emerge. The process of developing a set of general questions that could apply to a diverse range of students, faculty, and administrators seemed quite arduous at first given that each type of participant seemed to have a different role within the institution. A set of questions were developed based on the results of a pilot study. I present the pilot study below and elaborate on how I developed my interview questions.

Pilot Study

The site I selected to conduct the pilot study was a small liberal arts college with an enrollment that was greater than Maple College, but lower than Apple College. For the purposes of this study it shall have the pseudonym "Pilot College." Pilot is located in a suburban setting in the southern United States and is profiled in the book *Colleges that Change Lives*. It differed from the case institutions due to its larger endowment and institutional longevity going back to the nineteenth century. However, the college still accepts most of its applicants (83%) and lacks the visibility of elite colleges that practice liberal arts education. The college also faces competition from a number of honors programs, including an honors program at the state's flagship university that received a gift that was twice the amount of the total endowment at Pilot.

Participants. The pilot study was conducted over the summer when no classes were in session. The procedures that were followed in the main study were also applied in the pilot. Prior to recruiting participants, an e-mail was sent to the president at Pilot College requesting the participation of the college in a study over challenges facing liberal arts education. The president of Pilot responded with an approval letter for the IRB application process (see Appendix H). After receiving IRB approval, I proceeded to recruit faculty, administrators, and students by purposefully selecting a group who had a great amount of knowledge about the institution, but also had diverse points of view (Merriam, 1998). I sent an e-mail inviting a senior faculty member in the natural sciences, a senior faculty member in the humanities, and a junior faculty

member in the social sciences to participant. For administration, I invited the president, senior student affairs officer, senior academic affairs officer, and senior enrollment officer to participate. In addition, I invited three students to participate, including the editor of the Pilot College newspaper, the chair of the campus social committee, and a student senator. I asked each participant to engage in a 60 minute, one-on-one, on-campus interview.

In total, six of the invited individuals agreed to take part in the interview (three students, two faculty members, and one administrator). More detail about each participant is provided in the brief profiles below.

"*Kim"* is the senior student enrollment officer and has been at Pilot for four years. She has over 30 years of higher education experience in admissions, student recruitment, and financial aid.

"*Alice"* has been a faculty member at Pilot for six years in a social science discipline. She just received tenure.

"*John"* has been a faculty member at Pilot for about three decades in a natural science discipline. He has received a number teaching awards, including Professor of the Year from the Carnegie Foundation for Advancement in Teaching.

"*Brenda"* is a senior psychology major. She is involved in a number of leadership roles on campus, such as, editor of the student newspaper, president of the psychology club, and two different student-faculty committees.

"*Chad"* just finished his first year and is a political science major. The sophomore is currently a resident assistant and serves on the student senate.

"Don" is a senior economics major. He is currently a new student orientation coordinator and chair of the campus social activities committee.

Procedures. Prior to beginning the interview, I gave each participant a copy of the informed consent, explained that their participation would be kept confidential, and asked for participants' consent to have their interview audio recorded. All six participants gave consent and were interviewed and recorded. Following data collection, I transcribed participants' comments, using pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Measures. Prior to the pilot study, I brainstormed several interview questions and settled on two trial lists (see Appendices I and J): one for faculty and administrators (containing 20 questions) and one for students (containing 12 questions). I conducted the pilot to test the effectiveness of the preliminary interview questions and to determine which questions were important to future data gathering at the primary research sites. Before conducting the pilot interviews, I submitted my questions to peer review and made revisions to the questions accordingly (Merriam, 2002).

Results

The decision to have student-oriented questions separate from faculty- and administrator-oriented questions seemed logical at the time, but after conducting the interviews it became apparent that similar issues were viewed through different points of view and questions for all groups needed to be uniform to support triangulation. In addition, separate questions led to tangential discussions (e.g., faculty working

conditions, student social life) that were not directly related to liberal arts education and the pressure on such institutions to conform to norms of the higher education system. Furthermore, time became a constricting factor; I was not able to get through more than 10 structured questions in the hour-long interviews, given that I allowed participants to elaborate on their statements. Thus, the pilot convinced me that I needed to shorten the number of structured questions dramatically and order them by importance. I also planned to shorten the interview to 45 minutes to allow for better scheduling in the main study in case a participant went over the allotted time. In constructing my questions, I now elaborate on the results of the pilot study.

The interviews at Pilot revealed two dominant themes: institutional values and organizational change. Institutional values included a focus on student learning for its own sake rather than solely for career attainment. Many of the participants noted the value of personal interaction and promoted the college as being a community of scholars. In line with the second theme, participants noted organizational change in Pilot's emphasis on the future, public visibility, marketing, and appealing to more conventional types of students. The interviews revealed tension between different factions surrounding the proposed organizational changes, and objections to these changes centered largely on a desire to stave off a system that caters to consumer-driven and commercially-oriented practices.

Institutional Values

Institutions generally agree that "learning outcomes" (e.g., the percentage of undergraduates who graduate, secure employment, or enroll in graduate or

professional schools) speak to the merit of an institution. As one might expect, participants at Pilot placed a strong emphasis on these traditional learning outcomes and stressed the institution's success in that domain. However, the participants also noted the importance of a different type of outcome, namely the production of enlightened citizens. In general, Pilot participants viewed preparation for life in terms of cognitive flexibility—i.e., the ability to think critically, solve problems, and adapt to a rapidly shifting society. The faculty, administrators, and students at Pilot College tended to be concerned about developing proper habits of mind rather than training for a specific career. As Alice a faculty member in a social science discipline noted:

> There is so much downsizing through outsourcing and no loyalty anymore from employers that the middle class job market is becoming a much more dangerous place than it has ever been in the past. I think given that reality, a liberal arts college is even more important than it was previously. I mean you can get a computer degree and your knowledge is obsolete a month later and I think that even with a business degree you need to be flexible, you need to be adaptable. You can no longer master the content of one discipline, you need to be able to reeducate and retool yourself in order to face up to the rigors of the modern workplace. I think that we might need to sell that idea. I think that liberal arts education is even more crucial given the sort of ugly workplace that people are really facing now. They need to be adaptable and flexible and they need to be able to write well because they may need to change careers a couple of times.

Kim the senior student enrollment officer at Pilot explains the message that the college uses to promote the utility of liberal arts education. She explained:

> I will tell students and parents that liberal arts education is the best kind of education. Employers are looking for workers who can learn new skills and technologies. Technical training and career-focused education teaches skills that are often obsolete just a few years after they learn them. Liberal arts graduates tend to be more flexible and willing to learn new things.

Student examples presented below also confirm Pilot's minimization of career specific education.

> I do not know if I am going to do anything with economics. But, I feel with the education that I have gotten … [Pilot] has really prepared me for anything that I would want to do. I will have the skills and the attitudes to do it.
>
> –Don, Senior Economics Major

> I want to be a sports psychologist. I want to get my doctorate in sport psychology. The next step is to be determined. On a side note we just got two new psychology professors and one of them is teaching health psychology so I am pretty excited about that. So we will see, maybe after I take that class, I will be like wait, I do not want to do this anymore. And I will probably make another huge life decision the next semester. That is how it is around here. You have everything figured out and then the next semester you figure it out again and then the next semester you make another decision. Either way, eventually I will have a doctorate.
>
> –Brenda, Senior Psychology Major

As noted in the above comments, the desired outcome of a Pilot education is learning how to learn, which is not equated to a career, but perceived as the best skill in an economy that expects employees to constantly adapt and obtain new skills. Pilot's de-emphasis of career-based training suggests the unconventional nature of countercultural liberal arts colleges. Pilot's response made it necessary to ask participants at Apple and Maple how the educational experience at their institution prepares someone for life after college. I wanted to further examine how—in the context of liberal arts education— life after college was not equated with a specific career.

Pilot also cherished learning through social interaction. The faculty, students, and administrators seemed to hold a shared love of learning and a belief in their own role in promoting a culture of learning. Alice a faculty member in the social sciences

described the active role that faculty and students play in the learning culture. Alice said:

> It is a privilege to be a faculty member here. I wanted to be at a place where students and faculty get a lot of interaction and that is really one of the best parts of my job because of the high levels of interaction that you are able to have with a large number of students. And I have got to say also that the quality of the student body here is so terrific that it makes my job pretty easy because the students here overall have a general appreciation for education. Generally speaking, they work pretty hard, and they value learning. I taught at other schools where the student's sort of work harder at getting out of stuff than they did at learning things. By and large, our students' value what we do here and that makes it so much more fun for everybody involved—students and faculty.

The students echoed the responsibility that others on campus have for each other's learning. Brenda a senior psychology major described Pilot as having "excellent faculty interaction and involvement." Don a senior economics major elaborates further on how the college challenged him to engage in personal and academic growth. He said:

> Through my classes and in my discussions with professors and other students it has been very influential to me to stop thinking how I have been told to think my whole life—by my parents and by my peers—and sort things out for myself and to question. That has been another very big change. So I try to think about every aspect of something and what works and what does not work and just to think.

Organizational Change

Shifting Institutional Values. All three of the students interviewed discussed shifts in the values of the institution and in the students entering the college. Don, a senior economics major, and Chad, who just completed his first year at Pilot, sense a change in the direction of Pilot College toward a more consumer-driven and commercial-oriented administrative mentality. For example, Chad discussed the

college's plan to construct a real estate development of luxury homes, restaurants, and retail outlets on the college's vacant nature land. He fears that this will open the campus to a large population of non-students and change the culture of the campus to a more commercial (as opposed to academic) environment. Furthermore, in his role as a volunteer in the admissions office, he notes that Pilot is enrolling record number of first year students, and believes that the newer students seem to hold different social and academic values than the current student population. Chad elaborated:

> Pilot has that kind of feeling of an artsy-creative place. And with the majority of my class—and it looks like with the next class—that idea is being thrown right out the door. Students are more suburban, more upper-middle class. It is going to be a different atmosphere. It is going to be more like high school with more cliques and more people not getting to know each other (because they are going to bump up the number of people who are going to live off campus) because they plan to enroll a larger freshman class.

Don also expressed concern over a perceived shift in institutional values. He stated:

> [Pilot] is a place where you can just hang out and talk about anything you want. It is just okay to be independent in anything you do and naturally it is inclined to be liberal. I think they are going for a more mainstream image. It seems like they are trying to go more Ivy League or more like a state school sometimes. We are starting to lose our independent liberal arts atmosphere. On a lot of this, the ball has just started rolling so the campus is just starting to change. I do not really like that so much. I think that it should stay small and independent.

The student interviews indicate that the college was interested in attracting a more mainstream type of student. In these students' views, a more mainstream student consisted of one who was politically conservative, suburban, upper-middle class, and consumer-oriented.

Related to the notion of a more "mainstream" student population, all the students and one of the faculty member commented on the proposed establishment of

a football team as evidence of a shift away from the college's traditional ideals. As Alice, a faculty member in the social sciences made clear:

> The football and mascot idea are both a disaster. The thing about football and about both these things is that liberal arts colleges for a long time have had trouble attracting men, and I think that is really his goal. But what kind of men do they want to attract here? If we are going to attract just a bunch of frat boys, then we are no longer going to be a really funky alternative little place. And the enrollment thing also sort of connects to that. And we are also changing a little bit in that regard because Pilot used to be the place for kids from [the rural south] … who were absolutely aware of how bad their education was in the places that they came from. And they were just desperately happy to be in a place where people value learning. Frankly, we are the "nerdy kids" who were in AV club and those are my people, so that is why I am so happy here. It is not that I have anything against athletes but the thing is you have to have the school incorporate them, not have that kind of attitude take over the school. You do not want this school to become a testosterone-laden stereotype nightmare, and I taught at schools like that. At one place I taught, two mostly upper-middle class fraternities had a gang war and one kid got part of his ear torn off. I think that Pilot is about trying to break down those kinds of attitudes, and I really wonder about staying in a place that is not going to have room for the kind of culture that we have traditionally had. I am also concerned with the way that it was presented to us: if we want to attract more students we need to have more stuff. I am like, if we offer football and we get 20 more jocks then what do we offer? Are fraternities next?

Visibility. The college has launched a major initiative to publically define the value of liberal arts education. Students and faculty were positive about a recent launching of the "Galileo" program (name changed to protect anonymity), which requires all students to propose and complete outside learning experiences in one of the following six areas: artistic creativity, global awareness, leadership development, service to the world, undergraduate research, and special projects. Students receive an experiential learning transcript attached to their academic transcript recognizing their achievements in the Galileo program. In addition, students and faculty can apply for Galileo grants for educational experiences that take place outside the classroom.

Kim the senior student enrollment officer describes how the Galileo program has increased the public visibility of the college. She noted:

> The Galileo message expresses what Pilot was already doing to educate students. A few other schools offer similar programs, but Pilot is rare in that it is required for all students. Pilot has also received a great amount of attention and has been more successful than schools that have attempted similar programs at getting the message out. The president has been instrumental in getting external recognition.

Don, a senior, noted the value of Galileo as a program to recognize the process of liberal arts education at Pilot. He referred to it as "a formal way of stating what it means to be a student at Pilot— that everyone gets involved in things. Most of my friends would have gotten all of the requirements anyway. It is a good program."

Alice, a faculty member expressed excitement over what the Galileo program has accomplished. She exclaimed:

> I think Galileo is turning out to be more exciting than anybody thought it was going to be. We had no idea when we voted for it. I mean we were not sure how it would work out because you never really know exactly until after new things are implemented. But I think that Dr. "Smith's" leadership has been really amazing over there. I have to give the president a lot of credit for being a visionary in that regard because a lot of us really thought it was marketing, which I am sort of okay with marketing because in a way marketing is just telling people what you do well, and we do a lot of things well. What really convinced me was walking through the first poster day. I was just blown away by all the stuff that students were doing. We had a student who was the pastor of a church at 18 or 19. We had a student who explained to me something about computers, which I actually was able to understand at the time. I was so impressed by what the students were doing. I am really sold on Galileo so far. It is just a really life-changing experience, which I can only imagine what the students experience. I give the president a lot of credit for that. He has sort of used that to get more money and get enrollment up. We were down a little bit in enrollment for a while before that. I think Galileo is terrific. I have nothing bad to say about Galileo.

In all the interviews, it became clear that Pilot has a strategy to increase their visibility. One example was discussed in an interview with John a long time faculty member. He noted:

> It was not too many years ago when we realized that having …a good website is important, but it does not guarantee that students will attend an institution. However, it is essential to be seriously considered by prospective high school students all over the country.

Recently, Pilot College ranked as one of the top five best values in undergraduate education based on academic quality and cost among all types of four year colleges and universities. Following that award, Pilot developed a strategy to utilize the visibility, from the recognition afforded on CNN and other media outlets as an opportunity to improve their academic reputation among the public. Pilot hired a consultant who noted that the public equates cost of an institution with academic value. The consultant suggested that the college charge tuition rates for comparable to elite liberal arts colleges in other parts of the country (e.g., the Northeast and West Coast) and award more financial aid. Kim, the senior student enrollment officer described the rational for increasing their tuition by nearly 30% in one year. She said:

> It is important not to be viewed as less expensive. People from the Northeast and West Coast did not think we were as good because we were half the price of comparative colleges in those regions. We repositioned are tuition and remain committed to need and merit based aid. We will find a way to help any admitted student who wants to attend Pilot afford to do so.

This strategy appears to have aided enrollments and now has wide institutional support. As John a faculty in the natural sciences explained:

> A number of faculty were not convinced that higher tuition would increase perceptions about our academic quality. I will admit that I too was skeptical when the plan to raise tuition was first proposed to the faculty, but we are all

> now really pleased with how it turned out. We have had record freshman class sizes each fall and the academic quality has also improved.

Pilot has attempted to offset the increased tuition price with institutional grants, given that 99% of students receive institutional grants. The average institutional grant is more than half the posted tuition. The students I interviewed also confirmed the college's commitment to affordability. Brenda, a senior from a rural southern community, put it this way:

> Pilot is much more liberal with their scholarships than other institutions. I got a lot less offer from [the Flagship University] which surprised me. I thought it would be the other way around. It just depends first of all on how bad you want to come here. You can work it out in any sort of fashion. They are always willing to work with you on anything. It just depends on if you really want to be here.

The participants had mixed opinions on the strategies that Pilot College has enacted to address external threats of a consumer-driven and commercially-driven society and higher education system. The participants seemed to view current institutional strategies that publically promoted liberal arts educational values as positive (e.g., the Galileo Program), but perceived changes that would attract more mainstream students (e.g., adding a football team) as negative. However, the interviewees tended to be optimistic. Despite the views of her fellow classmates, Brenda concedes that the strategy of pursing greater visibility, commercialism, and appealing to bright—albeit more mainstream students—as a strategy that could make Pilot College stronger. She noted:

> As much as I hate to say it and hate to admit it, I do think that the changes at Pilot are eventually going to be an advantage to Pilot over other schools. I think [the changes] will be good for everyone who is involved. I do see it as a

> positive thing. I have never actually voiced this out loud and, I will never say it again, but I do think that [the changes] will be a good step.

Organizational change at Pilot raises concerns about the continuation of a student body that loves learning and values academic interaction outside the classroom with faculty and students. All of the students and one of the faculty members hinted on how a loss of countercultural values (e.g., a shift to competition over collaboration, individualism over collectivism, extrinsic over intrinsic motivations to learn) among students could undermine the mission of the college. These cautious individuals were hopeful that the college would continue to be comprised primarily of independent-minded students, who support the growth of others and possess a passion for learning. It is this sense of a scholarly community that the students valued the most and fear losing. Don described the learning community at Pilot as follows:

> It is socially active. It is just different than anything I have ever experienced, and it is different than I expected…I mean the relationships that I have had with the people here … the type of students that go here, and the professors and everything. I mean even as a freshman, I did not really grasp how awesome it is. The students that go here and the professors are my favorite part about the campus and that is the part that has really changed my life the most. It is just such an open place, I mean you can talk to anybody.

Question Development

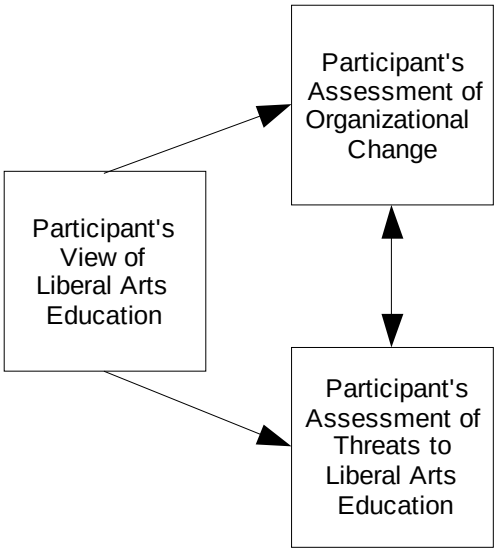
The pilot study aided the development of the structured interview questions that I used at Maple College and Apple College. The pilot study convinced me that I needed to limit the number of structured questions to less than ten in order to allow time for follow-up questions and participant elaboration. I also determined that I should ask faculty, administrators, and students the same questions in order to better

triangulate their responses on each theme. Using the list of questions I had used at Pilot, I created a single set of nine questions, using the original items that yielded the most fruitful responses during the pilot. I reformulated them to be applicable to either a faculty, administrative, or student respondent. The final nine questions focused on three areas: values, challenges, and roles (see Appendix K).

Developing a framework

For the current investigation, I developed a broad framework to analyze and present the data for each of the countercultural colleges. To examine how each countercultural liberal arts college confronts external challenges the literature and the pilot study suggest the examination of participant's assessment of institutional values, organizational change, and threats to their institutions (see Figure 5). First, the viewpoints of the participants are impacted by what they perceive as valuable about the institution. Second, the values that participants hold for their college impact their assessment of organizational changes. Finally, assessments of institutional challenges depend upon organizational change and the threats to the participant's ideals for the institution. Thus, in the results section, I utilize this framework to organize the results from each of the colleges.

Figure 5. Framework for assessing study participant's perspective on challenges facing liberal arts education.



Note. Participants were asked interview questions related to this framework.

Data Analysis

Unlike quantitative studies where data analysis typically occurs at the end of the study, data analysis in qualitative research is a continuous and recursive process (Mertens, 2005). In addition, research methodologists note that "no formula exists" for the transformation of qualitative data into findings; there is only guidance. Patton (2002) explained that in qualitative analysis, "the final destination remains unique for each inquirer, known only when—and if—arrived at" (p. 432). Therefore, I hope to apply the guidelines for quantitative research analysis with the understanding that complex topics may require unique approaches to data analysis.

For this study, I produced hundreds of pages of raw data after transcribing the interviews, collecting institutional documents, and recording field notes. I now explain the process that I underwent to organize profuse amounts of data and develop a framework for describing what the data revealed about the cases.

Coding. I began the process of breaking down the large amount of data into manageable sections through coding (Schwandt, 2001). I analyzed the data from each college separately in order to determine if there were any unique themes present in that institutional context. For each site, I started by grouping the interviews and documents by source—i.e., students, faculty, or administration. I then read the documents, noting similar ideas, concepts, activities, and viewpoints that were emphasized by each participant (Merriam, 2002). In rereading each interview, I choose a word or phrase to describe each unit of meaning within the data (which I refer to henceforth as a "code"). Some examples of my original codes include egalitarian governance, transparency, independent learning, and more conventional students. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that appropriate coding provides a "reasonable reconstruction" of the data. In total, I identified 91 separate codes for Apple College and 40 for Maple College. In order to make sense out of the numerous codes, I utilized the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, I entered each of these codes as rows in a table and added a column for each participant. I then indicated the presence or absence of the code for each participant, and totaled the number of participants that discussed that particular topic. That allowed me to weigh the importance of that particular code and recognize similarities among the

different codes. These similarities allowed for the creation of categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). At Apple College, a total of 21 categories emerged (e.g., the codes for active learning, passion for learning, and engaged learning became the category of "engaged learning"). At Maple, the original 40 codes collapsed into 12 categories (e.g., life-long learning, personal transformation, and personal reflection become the category "personal growth"). Even among these various categories, similarities remained. For example at Maple College, the categories representing a learning culture that valued "individualized learning" and the one representing a need for learners to be "autonomous and assertive" are both related to the theme of "self-directed learning." Thus, to further clarify my findings, I organized the categories for each college into overarching themes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Importantly, these categories are distinct from each other, but I am able to articulate a relationship that exists between them in the form of the themes that unite them (Ary et al. 2002). In the next two chapters, I elaborate on these categories and themes from each college and discuss their relation to my three research questions: institutional values, organizational change, and the challenges facing liberal arts education.

In my attempt to find similarities in people's perspectives, I also noted a handful of negative cases, or disconfirming evidence. During my analysis, I noted disconfirming evidence in the participant's column for a particular theme with a special indicator, which allowed me to return to the case and try to interpret the discrepancy between participants' views. For example, most participants thought their institutions valued a broad education as opposed to a narrowly-focused one. However,

a few participants at Apple disagreed and thought that students were too narrowly focused. In following the advice of Ary et al. (2002), I chose to take negative cases into account when affirming evidence for a major theme was not substantial. However, if there was substantial evidence to support the category, I did not modify it based on weak negative cases. I substantiated the evidence based on the frequency of credible sources.

Interpretation. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), interpretation—the last aspect of the constant comparative method—allows the researcher to "yield an understanding of people and settings being studied" (p. 135). Thus, in interpreting the data, I reflected on the relationships between categories and returned to the raw data to draw upon the words and actions of my participants as evidence of the categories and themes. In my interpretation, I developed a fuller understanding of how the themes illuminated the values, changes, and challenges facing each institution, and let my participants own words speak to their positions within the organization. I considered the possible biases, motivations, and experiences that informed each participant, and included these insights in my interpretation (Ary, et al. 2002). Moreover, I triangulated the data for each theme by participant type to explore the similarities and differences in the general perspectives of faculty, administrators, and students (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness speaks to the depth and accuracy of a qualitative inquiry and its findings (Schwandt, 2001). Specifically, trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and

Guba (1985), includes: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the congruence between a respondent's perception of a phenomena and the researcher's portrayal of the participant's views (Mertens, 2005). I addressed credibility in the current work through the use of member checks and peer review. Moreover, I explored and acknowledged my own subjectivity in an attempt to reduce my own biases from influencing my presentation of the participant's views.

Another aspect of building credibility involves looking at negative cases. Negative cases are statements which conflict with the general patterns that appear in the data (Glesne, 2006), and thus researchers may try to manipulate a participant's views to fit the researchers interpretation. I mentioned earlier, how I plan to handle divergent cases in my formation of categories and themes. Specifically, I weighed the impact of negative cases against the accumulation of positive cases in order to determine if a category or theme needed a revision or if the abundance of positive cases warranted generalization in the face of a negative case.

Furthermore, triangulation between different groups within the sample could be used to support or indicate the need for a revision to a particular interpretation based on the credibility of disconfirming evidence (Ary, et al. 2002). For example, administrators and students may have divergent views on the same topic, and all stakeholders deserve to have their views included in any interpretation, along with the researcher's assessment of why such differences in opinion would emerge.

Triangulation requires credible data sources, and informants are more likely to be truthful and share critical information when they believe that their identity will be kept anonymous (Spradley, 1979). Therefore, in order to promote truthful responding and protect the privacy of participants, I maintain confidentiality by using pseudonyms for both my participants and the colleges.

Through purposeful sampling, I interviewed a diverse sample of students, faculty, and administrators at both colleges. The varied sample allowed me to gather different points of view, which I triangulated based on the participant's position at the institution, number of years at the institution, and on demographic variables. I asked the same set of general questions, which allowed me to look for similarities in major themes between groups. The most prominent of these comparisons involved the comparison within and between students, faculty, and administrators.

Of all the data verification techniques, many regard member checks as the most critical for establishing credibility in qualitative studies (Creswell, 1998), especially in case studies where participants have a major role in directing the study and providing critical observations and interpretations throughout the data collection process (Stake, 1995). Thus, by giving participants the chance to verify their contribution to the work, member checks help ensure that researchers accurately depicted the perspective of the participant. In the current study, I contacted participants through email and afforded the opportunity to examine my assessment of their comments.

Transferability. I have attempted to provide extensive and careful description of each college's context and culture. Whenever possible, I utilize the actual words of each participant to demonstrate my interpretations (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Transferability refers to how well the findings of this study can transfer to other cases in similar contexts (Mertens, 2005). I support transferability of my data through the purposeful sample of diverse participants at more than one countercultural liberal arts college. This afforded the added opportunity to triangulate students, faculty, and administrators between two institutions with similar values and challenges. The use of more than one countercultural college also provides an opportunity for negative cases to be explored, illuminating potential variations in institutional culture that might lead to different responses to similar organizational threats. Thus, using two sites should improve the transferability of the findings to other countercultural colleges (Creswell, 1998). However, the transferability of this research is limited by the unique context of each case institution, and it cannot be presumed that the findings will transfer to all liberal arts colleges.

Dependability. Dependability refers to the extent to which the actual data collection remained consistent with the original protocol and throughout the data collection process (Schwandt, 2001). The current work met these criteria as the subject of this research has consistently focused on unconventional providers of liberal arts education and the challenges they face. Moreover, I adhered to the data collection process laid out in the research proposal to the University of Oklahoma IRB and maintained the same data collection and analysis strategies for all sources of data. As

with most qualitative studies, the data collection process was not stagnant (Glesne, 2006), as I allowed participant's responses to grow organically from the interaction and I varied the ordering of questions to fit the conversation. However, I asked each participant the same set of questions to ensure all participants had the opportunity to address the major issues of this research investigation. Lastly, I utilized a dependability audit to gather an outsider's perspective on the logical progression of the research and the appropriateness of the collection methods used (Mertens, 2005).

Confirmability. Confirmability refers to whether the researchers interpretations are warranted given the raw data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In the current investigation, I have exposed the process of my interpretation and provide ample examples to support my interpretation using the primary source of data—viz., the participants' own words. Throughout, I found that letting the participants' own words speak to their thoughts on the values, changes, and challenges provided a much more compelling elucidation of the themes.

Finally, I used an external audit to support the confirmability of my interpretations (Mertens, 2005; Schwandt, 2001). I had a colleague examine my problem statement, theoretical underpinnings for the study, research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis process to determine the appropriateness of my methods of inquiry and interpretations. The auditor focused primarily on the congruence between what the participants actually said in their interviews and my presentation of their viewpoints.

Locating the Researcher

In an attempt to add trustworthiness to the current investigation (Creswell, 1998), I now discuss my personal interest in liberal arts education and maintaining practices that run counter to a consumer-driven higher education mentality. First of all, I assume that attending a countercultural liberal arts college provides an advantage for intellectually-curious students over other types of institutions in the area of undergraduate education. Research supports my assumption by suggesting that students who attend liberal arts colleges receive "unique benefits," such as greater cognitive and affective growth (Astin, 1999). Moreover, attending these colleges confers disproportionate academic advantages, such as a greater likelihood of pursuing and obtaining an advanced degree (Astin, 1993; 1999; Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pope, 1996, 2000, 2006).

Given that I myself attended one of the countercultural colleges profiled in Pope's series of books *College that Change Lives* (1996, 2001, 2006), I hold strong beliefs about the effectiveness of a transformational liberal arts education. It is possible that my background may bias my interpretations of the positive and negative consequences of external challenges related to careerism and materialism on countercultural colleges. As a first-generation college student who did not have straight A's in high school, the opportunity to attend an institution that fostered the characteristics of liberal arts education changed my life in a way that I believe no other type of institution would have been able to do. I had the privilege to be part of a

learning culture that valued learning for its own sake with faculty and students who challenged my intellectual curiosity.

As I study the challenges facing higher education today, I am driven by my concern about the dwindling number of countercultural institutions that offer a liberal arts experience. I am also concerned about access to liberal arts education to first-generation students or students from other historically disadvantage groups. My fear is that liberal arts education may only be available for those with the most wealth or the best standardized test scores and high school performance. If this occurs, can these institutions still have a countercultural effect? I believe it is necessary to counter the forces of materialism and prestige-seeking that in general now dominate the culture of society and higher education (e.g., Carey, 2006; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Saunders, 2007).

I agree with Pope (2000) that colleges and universities need students with a diverse array of abilities to foster a more collaborative (as opposed to competitive) learning environment where students exhibit a greater willingness to take risks and ask questions. In elite institutions, students have to present themselves as intelligent, given that they represent the brightest and the best. Fear of being perceived as less intelligent prevents many of these high-achieving students from asking necessary questions and prevents others from hearing beneficial explanations from professors. At these lesser-known, less-elite institutions, students feel freer to admit their ignorance, and benefit from discussing what they do not know. To the extent that these countercultural colleges become more concerned about their prestige, financial

status, and selectivity and less concerned about the overall culture of academic exploration and expression, these colleges may lose their ability to change lives, as they admit only the academic high-achievers and financial elite. Access for any student who has the motivation to learn, coupled with the institutional ethos that makes countercultural liberal arts college unique, is something that society cannot afford to lose.

In order to maintain the research integrity and minimize the impact of my personal biases, I reflected on my personal views both before and after the site visits and attempted to locate—through prolonged engagement—evidence that challenged my assumptions. I tried to utilize the words of the participants in my interpretations of the data to limit my biases from eclipsing the participant's intention.

Limitations of the Study

Given that this study is a case study of only two countercultural colleges, the results may not be fully transferable to other countercultural colleges in general. I will attempt to address this limitation and increase transferability by focusing on more than one site in two different states. Furthermore, I believe that through the collection of an extensive number of interviews from a diverse sample, researcher observations, campus documents, and triangulation strategies will support the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

In addition to the concern with transferability and the depth of inquiry, another possible limitation concerns my inherent bias, being a first-generation college student who graduated from a countercultural liberal arts college. To address this concern, I

utilized peer reviews, negative case analyses, and member checks in an effort to limit the effects of my biases from influencing data analysis and interpretation. Despite the possible biases introduced, my own personal experiences as a graduate of a countercultural college likely enhanced my ability to relate to participants who value liberal arts education and aided my understanding of their involvement in the campus culture. Importantly, a number of qualitative researchers note the importance of developing a rapport and level of trust with interview participants in order to better allow them to open up and to answer questions more honestly and in details meaningful to them (Glesne, 2006; Spradley, 1979).

Finally, the research I conduct is limited by the information that participants chose to reveal to me as a researcher. Both in my interview style and my assurances of their anonymity (via the use of pseudonyms for each participant and for the colleges), I tried to make participants feel comfortable reporting their experiences and voicing their honest feelings and thoughts.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS FROM APPLE COLLEGE

Apple College opened in the early 1970s as the product of a series of philosophical documents, which sought to establish an innovative institution of undergraduate education. Guided by 1950s intellectual liberalism, a committee of leaders from three of the nation's most prestigious private liberal arts colleges and one of New England's major public research universities published *Foundational Document 1.*[1] The authors expressed concern with the ability of established liberal arts colleges to provided "space and opportunity" for education of the "highest quality" to a rapidly growing student population. They proposed the opening of a new college that would:

> Re-think the assumptions underlying education in the liberal arts and…reevaluate accepted practices and techniques, in order to draw up plans for a college which would provide education of the highest quality and at a minimum cost per student and with as small a faculty relative to this student body as new methods of the structure and new administration procedures can make possible (page omitted).

The authors of *Foundational Document 1* proposed that their established institutions work together to support the opening of a new independent liberal arts college, given that expanding the enrollments at prestigious private colleges seemed less tenable. The leaders of the four institutions believed larger enrollments would compromise the educational quality of the curriculum at their liberal arts colleges. Therefore, the leaders proposed that a new college for motivated students who no longer had a place at more established institutions (where admissions had become overly competitive). The original architects of *Foundational Document 1* believed that the curricular reforms offered at the new college would be most appropriate for

"very superior students." However, the authors noted, "the plan is not only designed for those who are most resourceful when they arrive: it is aimed at making the average student more resourceful" (page omitted).

In addition to providing access to high quality, liberal arts education, the architects of *Foundational Document 1* were seriously concerned with reforming the process of undergraduate education. They asserted that "average" students at their institutions often had the intellectual capacity, but lacked a sense of initiative, which hindered their intellectual growth and relationships with faculty. The authors argued that "the failure may lie as much in the traditional curriculum as it does in the students, who are capable of far more independence than most present programs encourage" (page omitted). Thus, *Foundational Document 2* sowed the seeds for the self-directed curriculum at Apple.

Although the authors of *Foundational Document 1* provided an overview of the many practical aspects of setting up a new institution of higher education, the plan laid out a radical curriculum and academic structure for that time in higher education. Radical elements included the notion that all students should design their own plan of study, faculty would not be organized by discipline in formal departments but in interdisciplinary schools, and that independent work would supersede courses as the primary focus of the student's education. Apple College developed its structural roots from these ideas in *Foundational Document 1*.

The notion that independent work would lead to better learning outcomes than a course-based curriculum seems to be the most radical idea that Apple College

implemented from *Foundational Document 1*. The authors insist that *Foundational Document 2* "dethrones the course as the unit of knowledge, and by doing so, drastically reduces the number of courses that need be offered. It will be able to do this because it will devote a great deal of faculty time to teaching the student to teach himself" (page omitted).

Apple College did not open for over a decade after the publication of *Foundational Document 2.* Consequently, America had transformed socially and culturally between 1958 and 1970 due to major movements in civil rights, sexual freedom, and the Vietnam War. The 1960s changed the way historically disadvantaged groups interacted with society, the economy, and the government. In higher education, students were demanding more socially sensitive education and their demands were trumpeted by a new generation of radical faculty. Academic scholarship sought to deconstruct traditional ways of knowing through postmodernist inquiry (Altbach, 1999). In many respects, the original vision outlined in *Foundational Document 1* to "re-think the assumptions underlying" liberal arts education had gained greater significance during the 1960s. Thus, the humanistic and culturally-relative ideals of the 1960s became a major thrust in the shaping of Apple College prior to the institutions opening in the early 1970s.

Apple's founders published two versions of *Foundational Document 2* affirmed the intellectual values of the 1960s (e.g., humanism, post-modernism, social activism), and served as both a template for and a recount of the creation and organization of Apple College, respectively. Importantly, *Foundational Document 2*

highlighted the societal transformations (since the 1950s publication of *Foundational Document 1*) and how they created even more changes necessary for creating a completely fresh approach to higher education. In particular, the authors argue that the social order, economics of education, pace of technology, and growth of knowledge rapidly evolve. The influence of the 1960s reveals itself in the importance placed on the need to "reconstruct liberal arts education so that young men and women may find acceptable meaning in social order and acceptable order in the freedom of an increasingly subjective culture" (*Foundational Document 2*, page omitted).

The founder's vision for Apple is one of liberal arts education constituted in a way that is "hospitable to contemporary life." By hospitable, the authors describe a curriculum that provides a lifetime of adaptability to changing demands for knowledge through inquiry-based knowledge acquisition. Lee, Greene, Odom, Schechter, and Slatta (2004) define inquiry-based learning as a diverse array of curricular practices that "promote student learning through guided and, increasingly, independent investigation of complex questions and problems, often for which there is not a single answer" (p. 9). According to Apple's founders, the "heart" and "intention" of Apple's curriculum is for students to exercise "intellect to learn, use, test, and revise ideas, concepts, theoretical constructs, propositions, and methodological principles and active inquiry" (*Foundational Document 2*, page omitted).

In reflecting on the academic curricula at Apple, the college's founders describe how Apple departs from the norms of American higher education by doing away with academic departments, course requirements, and traditional academic

majors. Moreover, Apple utilizes narrative forms of evaluation, as opposed to letter grades in the classroom. The authors reject the traditional letter-grading system, noting that it has "many disabilities and undesirable consequences–both in terms of 'academic' education and the larger development of the student as a person" (page omitted).

When Apple College opened in the early 1970s, the students embraced the self-directed curriculum, as one of the most unique colleges in the country. Students had (and continue to have) the freedom to negotiate their individualized college curriculum in collaboration with their faculty committee. In addition to the course offerings at Apple, students have the option to supplement their program of study with courses from any of four other established institutions that entered a consortia agreement with Apple, allowing even greater flexibility of the academic program. Students at Apple have the option to focus almost entirely on independent work, and (until recently) students could conceivably graduate without taking any traditional courses by working independently under the guidance of Apple's faculty.

In the early days, Apple College worked to fine-tune its curricula in a way that supported student success in an unstructured environment. As Apple's founders note:

> The task at [Apple] has been and continues to be, to provide support without excess structure, advice without strong imperatives, sanctions that do not stifle initiative, standards without absolutism, evolution without punishment or arrogance, and role models, which have intrinsic integrity and yet are contrasting and contradictory. The task of most importance requires sensitivity, dedication, and wisdom on the part of the faculty and administration (page omitted).

Apple College enrolled its first class of 251 students in the early 1970s and achieved its enrollment goal of 1,300 students within the first few years of opening. In the first two years, Apple College was one of the most selective institutions in the United States accepting less than 20% of applicants (*Foundational Document 2*). However, the college lost its initial luster as generations of students since 1980 became more career-focused and less radical (Astin, 1993; 1998). Consequently, applications declined in the late 1970s and 1980s only to rebound slightly in recent years. However, Apple College currently has achieved a record enrollment of over 1,400 students.

Enrollment has always been important for tuition-dependent Apple. The authors of *Foundational Document 1* deemphasized the need for fundraising, and the early leaders of Apple College failed to anticipate the rapidly growing cost of a personalized education until the college faced serious financial threats in the 1980s and early 1990s. Although Apple College received an initial $6 million gift to purchase an eight hundred acre orchard for construction of a campus, there were not significant efforts by the founding institutions to raise an endowment for the upkeep of the fledging college. The plan for the college was to have fewer courses, and thus the need for fewer faculty and academic faculties. However, the independent curriculum required greater instructional demands than the original plan anticipated. As a consequence of focusing on a low cost model of education and the increased demand for faculty resources, Apple College has always struggled financially. In the 1980s, the college considered ceasing operations or the possibility of being absorbed by a major

public research university. As of 2008, Apple College's endowment failed to surpass $50 million.

Despite financial difficulties, Apple consistently provides a high quality education. The distinctive learning experience fosters interdisciplinary experimentation and creativity, and clearly supports the successes of Apple alumni. Apple graduates have gone on to earn a number of prestigious awards, including a Pulitzer Prize, 15 Academy award nominations, 16 Fulbright Fellowships, three Truman Fellowships, as well as a dozen other prestigious fellowships. Over half of the alumni have earned advanced degrees, and the college ranks forty-first out of all colleges and universities in the percentage of alumni who earn a doctorate degree (Pope, 2006).

The Apple College of today is deeply engaged in a process of self-examination and is intent upon addressing the demands of society and a new generation of college students through liberal arts education. This reflective spirit may have already existed at Apple, but since the coming of the most recent president, the process has taken on a new zeal and significance within the campus community. In 2006, the current president authored *Apple Directional Document 1* (ADD1), which served as a catalyst for campus debate and reflection. Unlike the foundational documents, such as *Foundational Document 1* or *Foundational Document 2*, this document did not imply specific curricular designs or organizational plans. ADD1 aimed to entice campus stakeholders to debate and reflect on the values, processes, and future directions of the

college. Less than two years later, ADD1 continues to engage the campus in the refinement and communication of Apples educational ideals.

According to Apple's current president, "ADD1 set the tone for the institution to embark on a journey of ongoing improvement…." The result of almost two years of discussion on campus led the president to release *Apple Directional Document 2* (ADD2) in 2007. ADD2 like ADD1 is not a concrete plan of directives, but ADD2 is more specific than ADD1 regarding the kinds of activities and planning processes that will better assist the college in "redefining liberal arts education for the twenty-first century and for the world."

In the following section, I report the findings from my interviews at Apple. Given the framework I presented earlier (see Figure 5), the presentation of the results begins with the themes that surfaced as participants discussed what they valued about Apple. Next, I describe how internal stakeholders view changes at their institution, and finally, I elaborate on participants' views of the challenges facing the college, as well as the efforts to address those challenges.

Apple's Values for Liberal Arts Education

Theme One: Self-Directed Learning

The use of self-directed learning supports Pope's (2001) definition of active learning in countercultural liberal arts colleges, where students guide their own demanding intellectual experience. It also addresses best practices in undergraduate education by respecting diverse talents and ways of knowing (Chickering & Gamson,

1987, 1991). At Apple, students must take responsibility for creating their own learning, and their success largely stems from being self-directed and motivated.

Self-directed learning provides the method by which Apple's curricula encourages the learner's freedom to explore and refine individual academic interests. Although Apple's use of self-directed learning places minimal restrictions and requirements upon the student (see Knowles, 1980), the curricula establish the highest expectations for engagement in learning and liberal arts education. As a long-time faculty member and academic dean explained:

> The institution does not specify any major. We encourage them to formulate at various stages of their career either a series of questions or a specific question. And the breath of their study, the focus of their study is driven by these questions, rather than driven by some institutional sense of where the boundaries are of knowledge. So even if you say: I want to be a philosopher, we will not say okay do this. We will ask what questions you are interested in, and then we will build the course of study out of those questions.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 1

Demonstrating the importance of self-directed learning to Apple's curricula, all 20 of the participants from Apple discussed self-directed learning as an institutional value. Although not every participant believed that individualized learning or the curricula were ideal for all students, every interviewee highlighted self-directed learning as a defining aspect of the institution. The attributes that interviewees cited in support of this overarching theme of self-directed learning included: faculty freedom to teach, self-directed curriculum, independent learning, learning goals, narrative evaluation, no course prerequisites, no general education requirements, no specific disciplinary majors, portfolio evaluation, membership in a five college consortium, and support of the independent intellectual.

A third-year student from the Midwestern United States discussed how Apple appeals to the self-directed learner. She noted that the college's curricular structure helps students to broaden their intellectual interests while allowing students to commit to self-directed learning. She elaborated on the value of Apple's curriculum:

> It offers a certain kind of student who has been prepared in their earlier education and has already been given the basics to, write about things, and research things, and educate themselves. It gives them a chance to strengthen those skills, specifically, like the educated extension of themselves. It educates them to be in fields where they need a lot of self-reliance with independent work.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 19

One recently appointed faculty member learned from his first time teaching at Apple that, even within the structure of academic courses, self-directed learning is important. He elaborated upon the following experience:

> In my first experience teaching [at Apple], I assigned class presentations and they had to also do a project together. Then I told the students that you could write the final paper on the topic you presented, which I had assigned the topic they were supposed to present. I thought that would be easier for the students, because they have presented it and now they are writing a final paper on that. The reaction that came was interesting because they said no, we want to write on something that we really like regarding the class—a topic we wanted. Why are we constrained to doing something that we have already presented? So, again, it is not the issue of shortening of work. They wanted to do a topic, because they wanted to have a choice of topics regarding class that they wanted to do work on. That was my first semester with every class. Now the final paper is all their choice. I mean I do ask them to write a proposal, for example, to see if it is a relevant topic or if it is an appropriate topic or if they are asking the right question. But they get the choice. And that I find missing in other places that I have taught.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 15

One means through which Apple promotes self-directed learning is the use of portfolios and narrative evaluation rather than traditional letter grading. Participants

describe how narrative evaluation supports individualized learning. One faculty member related the following:

> In my opinion no grades is the aspect from which everything here flows. Actually it allows collaboration. It allows students to work on each other's work. I do not have to try to distinguish how much of this work was this ones, how much of this work was that ones. It instills students with a real desire to better their work, not to get a grade, which is "better." Narrative evaluations require a faculty member to be completely familiar with a student's work, that you understand what their project was about and know the student as an individual. You have to be able to describe it so that the reader can see what the student did, and then you give your own opinion of how well they did it. So the whole system works, I think, to make you more attentive to individual students, what they want, what they have done, and the quality of their work.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 6

A recently appointed faculty member also discussed how the students that come to Apple do so to be in a learning environment where all students have the responsibility to design their own course of study. He also mentioned the usefulness of narrative evaluations for student learning:

> It is almost like reference letters at the end of every class, but it contains a detailed letter of what the student did in that class, more or less. It also allows you to talk about progress, which is hard to capture in a grade as well as the nuances of a student's performance. So, for example, if they were engaged in terms of discussions but their writing was lacking, it gives you a more accurate picture of how the student does in the class, which is a benefit for the students.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 17

At Apple, the faculty participants tended to believe that freedom from providing basic introductory courses within disciplines allowed them to better support self-directed learning. Flexibility derived not only from the individualized focus of the Apple's curriculum, but also from introductory course offerings available for Apple's students at the other member institutions in the consortium. Moreover,

organization of Apple's faculty into interdisciplinary schools as opposed to discipline specific academic departments promotes curricular experimentation. A newly appointed faculty member concurred that curricular freedom was very important at Apple. She said "the main attraction for me is that I am able to create my own courses myself. No one can really tell me what to teach" (Apple College Interviewee 3). Thus, evidence indicates that curricular freedom helps faculty to support self-directed learning. As one faculty member noted:

> Because here, we can expect students to take classes elsewhere in the consortium, to supplement their interests, we can focus on the topics that we are particularly interested in or just things that will work well without feeling that we need some kind of survey course coverage model.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 17

Self-directed learning at Apple occurs through an emphasis on independent work, in particular, the Division Three project in the final year of study. As one faculty member pointed out:

> Apple expects high levels of independent work. Even fairly mediocre students here have to actually do a senior thesis where at a lot of places that is an honors credit. The senior thesis, forces them to confront the challenge of organizing a really big project that is going to last eight months and to devote most of their time to it. That is a really big thing! It is certainly very conceivable that a student who goes through our educational program, really takes it seriously, and really works to define their interests and to develop their interests and their capacities has done something that might be – unusual or special. I certainly have students tell me, good students who have gone on to graduate school, tell me that doing a Ph.D. thesis was a lot easier for them having been an Apple graduate, after having to as an undergraduate define and execute a research project. It was really their project. It was not a little spin-off of their major advisors work.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 5

In preparing for Division Three research, one student participant discusses how challenging independent work contributes to a quality undergraduate experience. She explains:

> I think, what you tend to learn in completing your Division Three is how to focus intensely on your own thoughts. I think it is more just the process of getting through and balancing what other people need from you with what you need to get done …You need to make sure you know your own limitations. So, I do not think that is specific to Apple, but I would say that is just a good challenging experience in general, and different people need different colleges that give that.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 19

The theme of self-directed learning comprised four distinct, yet related, categories, including: learner responsibility, engaged learning, personal reflection, and activism. In the following sections, I highlight interviewee's comments about each of these components of self-directed learning.

Learner Responsibility. Self-directed learning requires the ability of the learner to be assertive. Students must communicate learning goals and personal interests. They must take initiative to navigate a system that places a great amount of responsibility on the learners to design their own curricula, conduct independent projects, and seek out faculty mentors who can support their interests. The independent and rigorous nature of this curriculum necessitates that students have a high personal responsibility orientation (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991), which means that they not only learn autonomously but that they take "ownership for their thoughts and actions" (p. 26).

There were a number of faculty, students, and administrators who discussed learner responsibility. One faculty member who taught at Apple for over twenty years

described learner responsibility as a highly beneficial process and distinctive from the conventional college or university curricula. He explained:

> They are more responsible for their education. They have to take responsibility for what they are doing. More so than perhaps another school where [for example] you have a major in business and just kind of sit back passively and listen to a lot of lectures, pass one's courses for four years, and then receive a degree. That is one aspect. And then each [Apple] student has to do a senior thesis. So, again they have to put in more effort and say what is it that I really want to spend a year doing? And, what can I actually accomplish in the year? So, that kind of initiative prepares them in a sense for, not so much figuring out what they want to do later as a career, but, for being able to handle those kinds of challenges.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 12

As one student who just returned to Apple after a year's hiatus working in organic agriculture on the West Coast explained:

> It is really that process of designing the curriculum that I think is a really big part of what people get from the education here, and all the sort of agony and uncertainty that goes along with negotiation because it is a lot of negotiation with the professors and with the institutional curricular requirements.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 20

Many interviewees believed that learner responsibility poses a challenge for many traditional age college students and even for the students who choose to attend Apple. One first-year student, who spent her childhood moving around the country, put it this way:

> I think the school encourages independence, so I have actually learned that if you do not search out what you are looking for or you do not make the appointment with your advisor, then you could easily be dropping out. You have to be completely responsible for your own education. At other schools or in high school, someone is giving you encouragement and guiding you along by the hand, and here, it is like you are completely on your own. For some people, it is maybe a little scary at first. That is also why Apple does have … people who do not come back after the first year. They realize this is not the place for them, because it is too much independence at first. It is too much educational independence.

-Apple College Interviewee 8

The chief academic affairs officer validated Apple's high expectations for learner responsibility and the simultaneous challenges and benefits it bestows upon students. He noted:

> I think that there is a lot in the academic program in certain ways that prepares students in that learning to negotiate with faculty is important, and an important skill in terms of you cannot graduate from Apple without having to knock on some faculty doors, and ask faculty to work with you, and you are asked periodically to be reflective, and you see it in a number of different ways, and I think this is positive.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 16

Engaged Learning. Engaged learning is necessary to determine personal learning goals and have curricular freedom to explore a passion. Consequently, Apple attempts to get students to reflect and broaden their interests in a set of topics, even though not all students are aware or can articulate their interests when they first enter the college. However, as one dean and experienced faculty member shared, survey results from new students at Apple indicate that most new students "want to really focus on something they are passionate about" (Apple Interviewee 1).

From my discussions with faculty, administrators, and students it was clear that students who attend Apple have passion for investigating their own academic questions. The curriculum supports their intrinsic motivations to learn but they must be engaged and that requires what participants describe as a "passion for learning" or "intrinsic motivation to learn." For example, a student with a learning disability picked Apple for its challenging but flexible curriculum. She believes Apple's curriculum allows her to develop academically without having to struggle through

courses that undermined her confidence as a learner. She described her observation about what it takes to persist at Apple. She stated:

> In order to do well here, you have to do the work, and you have to be into it because you are interested in it, and because you are good at it. But also, I think people really need to be passionate about it, because you are never going to do anything if you are not passionate about it. And my friends, who have left, have for the most part gone on to much more structured schools, but they have really liked what they got at Apple. They realized that they just needed more structure than they got here.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 2

Students need to have passion for the work that they do. Faculty also describe a number of students who have taken risks for what they really want to do, such as traveling to Haiti to work as a journalist or caring for HIV infected orphans in China. As one faculty member noted:

> You have to take risks at Apple. To get through, you have to learn how to advertise yourself. You have to sell yourself to faculty who will be on your committee. You have to sell your work. It is not selling yourself! You have to sell your work! A lot have tried to substitute themselves for their work, but it does not generally fly. And I can tell a difference from what is on paper and what performance is being put on in my office. So, you do have to take chances, and they urge one another to take chances. They push one another that way. And we have set up this culture where if you have got guts you are going to put yourself in a place that is neither comfortable nor easy. And a lot of people do that.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 6

One student who is currently taking a course at a major research university in the consortium with Apple commented on the fact that most of the freshmen and sophomores in the 40 person class have "little interest or motivation in what the class is about." He attributes this to more conventional educational practices and explains how Apple's practices change the way students approach learning. He stated:

> In typical universities it is the way they are evaluated [with letter grades], it is an external thing, whereas here it is internally designed– it is your own program and you are invested in it. You have to want to be there because you have determined it. So in some ways, I think our countercultural system really expects and requires quite a lot of people; a lot that might be invisible from a more conventional educational standpoint. It requires a certain maturity and almost a certain internal spark.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 20

Personal Reflection. A number of participants indicated that Apple encourages individuals to reflect upon their lives in a deep and meaningful way. One faculty member at Apple noted:

> You are forced, at Apple, to develop an ability to chart your own course in life. And you are really challenged to do that and also to really figure out what you are interested in and what you want to do with it. This might not be the case in another college where you think I have to declare a major by Friday; well I guess I had better check something off.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 5

Such reflection is important, given that educational scholars suggest personal reflection supports the formation of learning goals that direct one's own learning (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 2000).

In reflecting on their own values and beliefs, students develop a deeper sense of themselves as authentic individuals. One of the students commented on how Apple challenges students to determine if their personal values are congruent with personal actions. For a number of participants, personal refection involves living as an authentic person. As the student elaborated:

> I really feel like the questions I asked are how fake can a person be? What your goals are and why are they that way? Are you trying to impress other people or are you really going to go out and do what you say you are going to do? I want to get into public health and work with kids with disabilities but at the same time, do I really know what that means? And a lot of people share

> that same sort of goal as I do, but there are a lot of people who I know here that hope to do that sort of thing but do not for whatever reason.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 19

Furthermore, the senior admissions and recruitment officer describes how Apple promotes self-refection. She said:

> At Apple, the center is, who am I? What do I care about? What do I want to study? Without any of those restrictions, so you have to ask yourself, at an unusually early age, who am I? I think that is important. I think the other thing that is really important is Apple's long commitment to social justice, social change, and change in general and critical thinking. There are not a whole lot of people who come here thinking that they want to make a lot of money in their lives. A lot of kids want to develop a personal philosophy and think: What should my life be about? What is the purpose of my life on Earth? How can I use my gifts whatever they are for a greater good?' I know kids ask themselves those questions at other places, but the freedom to pursue what you really care about is what makes personal refection the emphasis of Apple.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 13

Activism. Through learner responsibility, engaged learning, and personal reflection, students develop deeply held convictions. In general, the students who attend Apple have a passion for something and are interested in making a positive contribution to the world. The students often are described as socially conscious by faculty and administrators. Activism is encouraged on the campus and in the community. As the senior academic affairs officer noted:

> I do think Apple, in a sense, reinforces and helps develop those skills; to come in and basically say look, there is a problem and we want you to do something about it, and that is really good…As a college, we have always valued student activism … the previous president, used to say something like he was the scratching post that people kind of practiced on, you know sharpened their claws on, and he liked it. He kind of understood that part of his job as president was providing a target and experiences for students who have legitimate issues and that part of his job was to be responsive and to engage, and I think that satisfied him.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 16

Apple's participants described an institution that values self-directed learning through the fostering of learner responsibility, engaged learning, personal reflection, and activism. Both members of the Apple community and educational scholars (e.g., Knowles,1980; Merriam & Cafferella, 1999) hail self-directed learning as an effective method for promoting cognitive and affective development, and thus an important hallmark of Apple's institutional values.

Theme Two: Instilling a Broad-Based Liberal Arts Education

Intellectual capacities—such as a broad exploration of knowledge, intellectual curiosity, creativity, writing ability, and critical thinking skills—are the hallmark of an authentic liberal arts education. Although other types of institutions seek to promote these capacities, liberal arts education focuses squarely on these skills, to the exclusion of the pre-professional and vocational training common at other institutions of higher education (Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997; Nelson, 2007). One faculty member noted that when Apple opened in the 1970s, the emphasis on inquiry was "extraordinarily different." However, today, inquiry-based learning has become more common at more conventional colleges and universities.

I first heard the phrase "habits of mind" from one of Apple's long-time faculty members who used it to describe the goals of liberal arts education. He used the phrase to describe the valued learning processes at Apple College. Habits of mind include critical reading, critical writing, critical reflection, creativity, and inquiry-based learning. Apple's curricula compel students to develop proper habits of mind. He explained:

> There is an intellectual component, which is learning how to inquire, learning how to do a field. And we actually put a lot of emphasis on how inquiry is carried out in various parts of the intellectual world throughout their education, and so you do not suddenly find out how psychology experiments are done when you are a junior. You actually find that out your first year if you take a psychology course. In your first year you actually learn how journal articles work, and what a methods section is, and how results are reported. And it is done hopefully in a way that introductory students can understand, but you are actually told about how psychology studies are conducted in a fairly fine-grain level of detail that you would never get anywhere near in an introductory psychology textbook.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 5

Students were eager to credit Apple's program of study for their rapid academic growth. As one first year student reported: "It is very valuable. Even from the first paper I wrote to the most recent paper I wrote, there is already a significant difference in what their comments are. The progression is quite significant" (Apple College Interviewee 18). However, students focused less attention on the processes through which this growth occurred than faculty. Among my participants, faculty emphasized the intricacies of curricular goals (namely, the development of specific skill sets like writing, creativity, critical thinking, etc.) in the learning process more often than students.

Interdisciplinary Learning. Self-directed learning could lead to a narrow or discipline-specific focus. However, the interdisciplinary structure of Apple encourages students to explore the perspectives of many disciplines when pursuing their academic interests. I define an interdisciplinary approach as the simultaneous use of different disciplinary methodologies and perspectives to examine a set of academic questions that transcend a single disciplinary boundary.

One of the faculty members argued that the curriculum at Apple was intended to approach interdisciplinary properly; where as, at other institutions interdisciplinary work often meant the application of a discipline's epistemological and methodological assumptions to another field. He believes that interdisciplinary work at Apple aims to achieve the appropriate definition. According to him, "Interdisciplinary work means really taking the insights and the practices, the methodology, and worldview of all the disciplines to challenge the way you think about the world and to incorporate that into your analysis and so forth" (Apple College Interviewee 17).

A member of the founding generation of faculty at Apple discussed how interdisciplinary work promoted both broad-based and individualized learning. He elaborated:

> Apple is organized interdisciplinary and because of its lack of departments, the view is sort of pervasive that interdisciplinary work is a good thing and that it is possible to define interesting academic projects that are not confined within traditional disciplines. I have found a number of students take advantage of that. I think that facilitates the idea that you can define your own thing, because the faculty has this organization, and there are a lot of courses here that cross disciplinary boundaries. It opens up a lot of possibilities that might be hard for students to realize at other institutions.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 5

Theme Three: Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning describes an egalitarian learning environment where students and faculty work together to achieve a set of learning objectives. In the broadest sense, the learner is challenged and supported by peers and faculty to reach desired learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are often negotiated between faculty and students who work together to support self-directed and broad-based

learning, and according to Pope (1996, 2001, 2006), competition between and isolation of learners inhibits collaborative learning.

In support of collaborative learning, a number of scholars note that high levels of student-faculty and student-student interaction promote undergraduate student learning (Astin, 1993). Meaningful relationships between faculty and students support the learning process and are highlighted as characteristics of liberal arts education (Blaich et al., 2004; Riesman, 1998) and best practices in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, 1991). Evidence supports collaborative learning as an important value at Apple College. The senior academic affairs officer described the valued nature of the learning relationship between faculty and students at Apple. He explained:

> I think it really is a developmental view, when the system works the way it should; strong relationships develop between faculty and students. It is a different kind of experience than in other places. In terms of the quality of the relationship with the faculty, the fact that every student is supposed to have that kind of relationship with the faculty is perhaps where Apple is distinctive.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 16

Administrators and faculty argued that high-levels of student-faculty interaction characterize many liberal arts colleges, yet they believed that Apple achieved strong faculty-student relationships in a distinctive way through their individualized curriculum. As one faculty member, who has been at Apple for over two decades, noted:

> The divisional system of independent work really fosters personal one-on-one interactions with faculty outside the classroom. That is because, really from the very beginning, in various ways you are in a dialogue with faculty about your ideas. When you are a Division One student [first year student], dialogue, I

> guess you could say centers around … this portfolio of your work that you are showing to your advisor that you are discussing with your advisor all the time.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 1

A first-year student described how interactions with students have contributed the most to her learning. She explained:

> My classes are really discussion based, so I learn a lot from the students. And so when you have all these different people's opinions coming at you, you have to learn how to understand what they are saying…understand their arguments, and then present your argument in an articulate way, and express your point of view, and see your point of view from where they come from.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 8

A second-year student valued the high degree of informal learning between students outside the classroom. She described these interactions as typical of Apple and offered the following antidote:

> I remember one night my friend came by with his girlfriend. I told him to come by and study because we were all studying, and as soon as they walked in the door, somebody read something about racism… And then everybody got into this huge discussion about race and class and power and students at Apple and like about where we come from and our high schools, and this whole thing – and –my friend goes, okay, so my girlfriend does not believe anybody actually gets work done at Apple because this happens every time we come over. She will not come and study with us anymore. I think it is so much better than just sitting and finishing the reading because you really do get to draw on each other's experiences.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 2

Finally, a faculty member who began working at the college more than 20 years ago noted that the absence of traditional grades greatly decreases competition between students and enhances collaborative learning. He stated:

> Because there are no grades students have a very different relationship with each other in the classroom. They are not competing for my attention. They are certainly not competing for my estimation. They are complicit with each

> other. They are actually trying to mutually help each other out. And I always say that requires a maximum candor and a maximum tact, and they come up to that challenge always, almost always. And if somebody is being disagreeable they talk each other out of it. They call each other's bluff. They have a wonderful way of supporting each other. Now that is something I have never seen anywhere else.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 21

In sum, participants valued a number of aspects of Apple's environmental and curricular structures that supported liberal arts education. Apple's participants described the institutional importance of self-directed learning and the developmental challenges and benefits it provides to Apple's students. Apple's faculty not only work with students to maintain curricular flexibility but also to emphasize a broad-based liberal arts education. Lastly, collaborative learning occurs very frequently, even though students engage largely in independent work. The administration and faculty encourage high levels of interaction and engagement, both in their small discussion-based courses and through collaboration on students' projects. Apple's administrators, faculty, and students expressed a strong commitment to sustaining liberal arts education and the self-directed nature of their program of study.

Perspectives on Organizational Change at Apple

Apple College's students, faculty, and administrators hold a number of shared values that form the educational ideals of the institution. As changes occur at Apple, participants evaluate whether these modifications support their values for the institution. I describe three themes relating to change and attempt to incorporate the values noted previously.

Theme One: Structuring the Curriculum

Participants identified the recent change in Division One (i.e., the first-year) curriculum as perhaps the most significant modification to Apple's educational experience. Originally, first-year students were required to complete an independent project in each of the five interdisciplinary schools. In keeping with the ideals of self-directed and interdisciplinary learning, students developed broad questions that they had an interest in researching. These projects required a high level of student responsibility and initiative to find faculty who would support and critique their projects. Students rarely finished their projects before they moved on to their concentration courses during their second year. However, they needed to finish the projects before they could complete their Division Two (i.e., concentration of courses) and propose their Division Three (i.e., final thesis) research project. In the mid 1980s it became apparent that most students failed to complete Division One projects in the first, or even in the second, year. Consequently, many students entered their Division Two courses without sufficient academic preparation. Moreover, the overwhelming nature of these projects and isolation from other students ultimately contributed to a relatively low six-year graduation rate (57% in 2003) compared to other private residential liberal arts colleges.

Due to these problems, the college concluded that first-year students needed more structure and additional contact with other students. Since the fall of 2002, the first-year curriculum now requires students to take eight courses instead of complete five independent projects. Specifically, students must take at least one course in each

of the five interdisciplinary schools during the first year. The intention of the new Division One curriculum is to provide a more structured academic and social learning environment for first-year students. However, Apple College has attempted to tie the newer curriculum to its values. For example, it attempted to support self-directed learning by allowing students to take any course that they desired in each of the five schools. Moreover, the college encourages instructors to assign projects that support independent learning and have an interdisciplinary focus.

Participants' reactions to this change vary somewhat. Most faculty and administrators were satisfied with the impact the change has had on the students' ability to persist through the curriculum. For example, Apple has seen a dramatic improvement in their six-year graduation rate, from around 57% to above 70% in the last four years (interestingly, the percentage of students persisting beyond the first year remains stable, around 80%). Although it is impossible to pinpoint one specific factor in this increase in graduation rate, the new curriculum may have better prepared students for completing Apple's demanding Division Two (i.e., concentration courses) and Three (i.e., final projects).

Despite the possible benefits of these changes, the new first-year curriculum has sparked controversy with some former and current students. Self-directed learning remains very important to the students who attend Apple, as one first-year student stated:

> I feel like they are kind of pushing more and more requirements. There is more convention. I think it is going to be harder to attract students and keep them here with more and more convention. Students come here for the educational independence too. I think that is a major issue with the first year. I think they

> need to tell people there is a little more structure, when they are saying come to this college. Because, I remember being recruited here with freedom to study what you want.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 7

Several student and faculty participants mentioned the student-led group "Re-Rad" that works to retain the independent projects that characterized the original Division One system. The group created an optional mentorship program for new students who want to work on independent projects under the guidance of students in their final year of study. According to Apple College's website, "Re-Rad is a movement dedicated to re-radicalizing Apple's academic program, and ensuring that Apple remains true to the unique educational goals that it was founded upon." By enacting an organized effort to resist infringements on Apple's traditional self-directed curriculum, students exemplify their commitment to social activism as an organizational value.

Most participants supported the modification to Division One but thought that first-year students should have the opportunity to engage in self-directed learning and independent projects. One long-time faculty member gave a balanced response to critics of the change in the first-year curriculum. He noted:

> We were forced to say, yes, Division One was the greatest experience of your life, but it was not the greatest experience for the kids who dropped out of college because they could not finish their projects. The intention of the change in the system was never to say students cannot do the projects anymore. There are all kinds of mechanisms for doing them and I like what the [ReRad] students are doing, because they want to keep the project option open. But again actually, they are in a way addressing the problem too. They have got a mentorship. We did not have an advanced student mentorship in the old days. We did not have any way to really guide the student. The only way of scaffolding the projects was if the student were to run back to the faculty

> member. And if you got 20 of these things going, there is a pretty good chance that many first-year students are going to slip through the net.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 5

Theme Two: Enrollment Growth

As discussed in the previous section, Apple's change in the first-year program may have contributed to enrollment growth, as a result of increased student persistence to graduation (i.e., more students are retained into the second, third, and fourth years than in the past). The increased retention through to graduation and larger entering classes mean a greater number of students enter and persist through the system to earn a degree. As a result, enrollment has increased by about 25% over the last decade. The larger enrollments have financially benefited the institution. However, increases in enrollment may have also strained an academic system that requires students to work individually with more than one faculty member to design independent research and create a concentration of courses. Enrollment growth coupled with the added course requirements of Division One have led to increased reliance on part-time faculty, which alters the academic experience of the institution. A number of students expressed concern over their ability to secure and maintain personalized attention from faculty (i.e., part-time faculty might leave after a year, and full-time faculty might be more busy with more students), which ultimately could threaten an environment of collaborative learning. For students, small class sizes and individual contact with faculty are essential to the learning process, as a third-year student explained:

> The faculty are very important-you have to have two of them on your committee, which is different than most schools where you have one advisor. I feel like in a lot ways they are way overworked… you are supposed to be getting to know them and interact with them as scholars…I feel like I get to

> know a lot of the faculty, and then they leave because they are visiting or on sabbatical, which is kind of a problem. I got really close to this one professor last year, and we were talking about all my other classes and about research she was doing for a dissertation, and we were really getting along, but she was just a visiting professor and left after a year. And there are a lot of them [adjuncts] that do that, and so, I think that is a bigger problem in higher education right now.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 2

Despite students' concern over decreasing access to faculty, one administrator noted that class sizes have remained relatively stable and the student-faculty ratio stays relatively low (at around 11 to 1), placing Apple well below most institutions of higher education and on par with elite liberal arts colleges. Moreover, because first-year persistence rates have remained steady, he noted that the majority of the enrollment growth does not impact the first year courses; rather, the increase in graduation rates largely impacts students in their last few years of study, when they generally take fewer classes and engage in more independent study.

In contrast, faculty perceived the situation differently, highlighting the strain from an increase in course requirements for the first year, coupled with overall enrollment growth. Given that, in the last decade, the growth in enrollment (around 25%) has outstripped the growth in faculty (around 10%), faculty are responsible for mentoring a larger number of students. As one faculty member noted, the change in enrollment has not been accompanied by a large enough increase in full-time faculty. She explained:

> It has just really drained the resources of the college. We do not have enough classroom space to require our first year students to take eight courses. We did not have the number of faculty– not even the number of chairs in classrooms that could accommodate that. So we have had to hire all kinds of adjuncts, we have had to iron things out, and adjuncts, while often very good themselves,

> cannot participate in what is central to our program, which is that you follow students year after year.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 6

Although Apple's enrollment growth has given the institution greater financial stability, the increased number of students has put pressure on the academic resources and raises the fears among some students and faculty that the educational climate at the institution might not remain as supportive of student learning. However, the class sizes remain relatively small and the amount of personalized attention that Apple's students receive far exceeds that at other institutions. Given that the changes are relatively recent, only time will tell how the institution will react to these changes.

Theme Three: Generational Differences in Faculty

In addition to changes in the first-year curriculum and the consequences of increased enrollment, Apple College is beginning to notice generational differences in the values of faculty. Generational differences between new and old faculty were not discussed as an important change by the students, but this topic was significant to the vast majority of faculty participants. A number of participants see new faculty as more research-oriented, even though Apple's undergraduate teaching remains an important focus of the college.

Apple attracts different faculty today than it did when it first opened three decades ago. At that time, the faculty who applied risked their academic careers to work at a fledgling institution with an experimental approach to undergraduate education. Now that Apple has established itself as a successful liberal arts college, the institution attracts a broader array of faculty. Faculty indicated that, today,

candidates for new faculty positions choose Apple primarily because they need a full-time academic job more than any other reason. Many reported that current candidates tend to focus on research just as much as, and sometimes more than, teaching. However, this shift in job candidates may stem from a change in the culture at Apple, which—like most institutions—now expects more research from faculty for appointment and promotion. Apple's faculty and administrators seem to share the belief that faculty research productivity enhances teaching—even if it detracts from the time a faculty member devotes to teaching. Perhaps the competitive job market for faculty and the emphasis on publication in graduate programs has contributed to the research orientation of the new faculty working at Apple. A recently appointed faculty member describes what is important to new faculty at Apple. He stated:

> The expectations of the faculty have changed… When the college becomes successful, it's not a new experimental college [and] that may attract a different kind of faculty compared with thirty to forty years ago. We are getting a different type of faculty. Now, as faculty members, a lot of us feel that research is an important component. Thirty to forty years back, as an experimental college, [Apple] was just for the students, as a teaching institution.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 15

A faculty member who has been at Apple for over two decades noted that older faculty are just starting to discover that they are "not quite on the same wavelength" with younger faculty on a number of issues. She noted that the younger faculty generally advocate for more structure and more prerequisites in the curriculum. This preference conflicts, in some respects, with Apple's traditional orientation toward a more individualized program of study. Perhaps the most significant difference

between senior and junior faculty involves the relationship with students. She elaborated:

> Another interesting thing that has changed and will probably get even more interesting in the future is that there is a kind of generation gap between older faculty and the younger faculty. Well, the younger faculty are completely focused on …doing their research and less oriented toward the students. The older faculty have a critique of the academy. They do not view the academy as flawless. They are always looking to change things. The younger faculty believe the academy is fine the way it is. They would not change a thing, and why can these students not straighten up and read and get their work done? And part of that is because they have just survived graduate school.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 4

Overall, Apple's participants highlighted three major organizational changes affecting the academic culture at Apple. First, they identified the recent transition to a new Division One curriculum (from a collection of faculty-supervised independent projects to an elective course system) as having a dramatic impact on the institution. Although participants tended to view the change as positive (e.g., it may have helped to increase Apple's graduation rate), many expressed concerns about protecting students' flexibility to engage in self-directed learning at all stages of their education. Perhaps as a result of how the new Division One program contributed to Apple's graduation rate, the second major change involved an enormous growth in enrollment (about 25% in the last decade) that has stabilized Apple's financial position, but put additional strain on full-time faculty and campus facilities. The final major change that participants reported involves the generational differences in Apple's faculty. The institution attracts a more professionalized faculty who are increasingly devoted to and rewarded for their scholarly productivity. Apple's senior faculty view research as valuable, but many remain focused on teaching as opposed to research. Given the

modification to the first year curriculum, growth in enrollment, and shifting faculty priorities, the ultimate effects of these organizational changes on Apple's traditional values remain unknown. In the following section, I explore the challenges facing Apple.

Participant's Assessment of Challenges facing Apple

In my original framework (see Figure 5), I asserted that organizational changes and challenges reciprocally influence one another. Thus, institutional changes may occur in response to challenges, but changes may produce unexpected challenges. For example, a desire to increase persistence to graduation led to modifications in Apple's first-year curriculum. The resultant increase in student persistence to graduation, coupled with more entering students, helped to stabilize the institution financially, but also strained Apple's academic resources and threatened the ability of the faculty to provide each student with the same individualized learning experience. Given that Apple College is largely tuition dependent (receiving about 80% of its revenue from tuition and fees) and has a modest endowment (below $50 million), most faculty, administrators, and students recognized the importance of maximizing enrollment in order to meet the institution's financial obligations. Despite the fact that Apple has maintained smaller class sizes and an impressive student-to-faculty ratio, student and faculty participants worried about the institution's ability to maintain the same quality of educational experience for a larger population of students.

In the current section, I discuss the institutional threats identified by Apple's students, faculty, and administrators. The most important institutional challenges that

emerged include: establishing institutional relevance, creating independent learners, fostering a sense of community, maintaining institutional distinctiveness, and securing financial resources. Below, I elaborate on each of these themes.

Theme One: Institutional Relevance

Participants describe the opening of Apple College as a perfect moment in time, when a strong critique of the conventional academy brought together a radical faculty and radical students who needed an alternative form of higher education. However, the radical societal elements that yielded discontent with traditional forms of education are no longer as active or prevalent as they were in the 1960s and 1970s. Students appear more interested in obtaining a high-paying job than developing a meaningful philosophy of life or challenging conventional societal structures (Astin, 1993; 1998). Competition in the faculty labor market has led full-time faculty to be more committed to their research and individual field of study than to teaching and their particular institution (Zusman, 1999). Participants expressed concern over Apple's ability to continue to communicate the relevance of its unique academic mission to people outside the institution, given current societal conditions (i.e., increased careerism and competition between institutions).

The senior academic affairs officer notes that continued success necessitates Apple's willingness to continually monitor and adjust institutional practices. He elaborated as follows:

> In 1970, if you were opening a college just to open another college you were either an idiot or insane, because if you just look at the census data you would know the number of 18-year-olds is going to start declining, the notion that faculty would be highly-mobile was just about ready to fall about because as

> the number of 18-year-olds declined, the number of faculty slots did. You were entering into period historians call the "Great Stagflation" where you had …both inflation and a recession at the same time, which is theoretically supposed to be impossible, and so it was really a pretty stupid time to open a college, and the reason they opened it, and the reason I think it succeeded was that it was not just supposed to be another college. It was a college that had a mission and its' mission was to be part of ongoing debates about undergraduate education and also involvement in the wider world, and I think what the current president is saying is that it still has to be true. You have to be more than just another college, and what are the issues we want to be involved in for the next generation, and … to get the community [students, faculty, and administrators] to say what it is we want to be in this next phase of our life. So, I actually think that is a great challenge, and … I am confident we will rise to that.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 16

As noted earlier in the chapter, Apple College was one of the most selective colleges in the country when it opened in the early 1970s, but that is not the case today. A number of faculty and administrators explained that, in the first decade, Apple received a flood of applications because it resonated with the times by giving students greater freedom and responsibility. Apple was revolutionary, because it did not have grades, it shifted learning responsibilities to the students, and it encouraged interdisciplinary work. It constituted an experiment in undergraduate education. Today, however, most students, faculty, and administrators no longer view it as an experimental college, but as an institution with established practices. They point out that other institutions have added self-designed majors and interdisciplinary work to their curricula, so Apple's distinctiveness has perhaps diminished. Apple's challenge, as one long-time faculty member and dean argued, is to understand the present academic landscape and figure out how to resonate with your audience. He explained how the college should proceed:

> I think our biggest challenge is to convincingly make the argument that an Apple style education provides for many students, a richer, better, deeper, stronger education than you will get at a traditional institution. And I think that there are three elements to making that case. First is that it has to be true, the second is that you have to have evidence, and the third is you have to be convincing.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 1

A number of students noted that Apple is in a process of deep self-examination, and many shared their thoughts on how the institution should address the needs of students in the twenty-first century. The prospect of institutional change appeared uncomfortable for some students, as it casts uncertainty onto the future of cherished institutional values (e.g., self-directed learning). In fact, one student described Apple as going through an "identity crisis." Another student in her second year said, "I think Apple's challenges are trying to live up to its ideology. It wants to be a diverse place, it wants to be a cutting edge place, and so it just has to put in a lot of efforts to make those things a reality" (Apple College Interviewee 8).

Theme Two: Self-Directed Learning in Young Adults

Undoubtedly, Apple's appeal to students from across the country stems from the freedom and flexibility Apple offers students to design their own curriculum. With this freedom, however, comes the profound responsibility for students to craft their own educational experience. Thus, success at Apple rests on students' commitment, maturity, and ability to complete their program of study, and the ability of traditional age college students to sustain the necessary effort to succeed has been an ongoing organizational challenge. In my interviews, participants noted the precarious balance between creating a more structured environment where most

students persist and succeed that simultaneously offers traditional age college students a more personalized and self-directed education. A faculty member who has been at Apple for over three decades related the following:

> You might say that even students who loved the experience, they weren't really ready for it, but they were able to rise to the occasion through some combination of motivation and ability. We still face a challenge, if our goal is to create somebody who is really an independent intellectual, who can define their own projects and knows enough about inquiry to pursue them. Do we really have an educational system that succeeds in doing that for an appropriate percentage of students? And I think we've still got a ways to go even after 35 years. I think actually that's the biggest challenge that we face as an institution delivering a liberal arts education.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 5

The president, as well as other administrators, expressed concerned about how to create the best balance between institutional support and student self-reliance. The president explained:

> We…assume that students will manage their time and their motivations from the beginning. And for the students who can do this, it is sublime…-- like [a] graduate school for undergraduates. But the reality is, we have never had solely students who were capable of that. And how do you deal with that? First of all, there would be a number of options. We could just say we are going to be a place for the 200 students who really can do it at the beginning, and I am not sure that is viable...And like everyone else, our desire is to diversify – to try to correct, in our small way, the kind of inequities in our entire economic and educational system, which would be totally flummoxed if we took only the 200 students who can work completely independently from the beginning…But we believe by year four … that the transformation of Apple education is working on a broad spectrum and including people who really might have had to stretch in this regard at the beginnin*g*. …We may over-respect the students in thinking they do not need more temporary motivators to get them to do it and to step up to that. So, I think the real issue is making sure almost everybody is able to get onto that fully or mostly independent track. One understands that there are always going to be a few that just are not going to make it.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 11

Another aspect of balancing individualized learning with structure was to examine if Apple's curriculum has cohesiveness. Faculty and administrators participants seemed to be asking: How do the courses in Division One support the concentration in Division Two? How do Division One and Division Two prepare students to complete their final research projects in Division Three? Interestingly, some faculty who support the new course-based Division One believe the curriculum is less cohesive than when students designed their own interdisciplinary projects. One of the faculty who has been at the institution for two decades noted:

> People, of course, complain now that what we have is basically eight courses and a different kind of check-off list. I mean, there is no coherence in the first-year program other than a course from here and there and over there. Before, the common denominator was that they were using the same method for study—modes of inquiry.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 14

In general, students wanted to know how the new first-year program has benefited them. Student participants were concerned the additional course requirements might hinder their freedom to guide their learning experience. A second-year student said the following:

> Apple has to reevaluate its academic systems, specifically, within the first-year and see how well that is working, because it was intended to help people get to the next level. So I think looking at that, reevaluating it, and see where we need to go from here in terms of academic structure.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 8

Perhaps the best explanation of the challenge facing Apple's values of self-directed and individualized learning came from a longtime faculty member. He acknowledged:

> I think we are discovering that … distinctive parts of our educational program are actually not well-implemented for all of our students. So, we now face this challenge of delivering a high-quality liberal arts education to a higher proportion of our students than we actually are. That is probably because we have given our students so much freedom that they are free to not get a very good liberal arts education. We have to figure out a way to structure that freedom more without giving up on things like narrative evaluations and self-initiated majors. We really do not want to give those things up because it is in the college's DNA.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 5

Theme Three: Fostering Social Community

The first item that the senior academic affairs officer discussed as a significant challenge for Apple had little to do with faculty issues or financial resources. He seemed very concerned with the challenge of developing social community in a curriculum that values individualized and self-directed learning. He believes that independent-minded students make an important contribution to the learning culture at Apple, but the college needs to help them gain social skills in order to be successful both in college and beyond. He explained:

> We bring in interesting students, and I do not want to change the kind of students we are bringing in. If you read the applications, the picture you see is very smart kids, interesting kids, kids who are interested in things, and on the one hand kids who are in some ways desperate to live in a community, but who describe their place in the communities they are coming from as that of the outsider. They are people who, on the one hand, want to live in a community, but on the other hand, are in their comfort zone when they are the outsider looking in. And then you put them in single rooms and in an academic kind of rhetoric that romanticizes the notion of independent work. I mean we do not do a particularly good job of building community. We bring in students who often find it difficult to form communities, and we do not have a whole lot of support systems to address that. Social life is usually described as being very cliquey. These cliques form, and once they are formed, they are kind of hard to break into. And if you are not in one, it is hard.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 16

Students expressed concerns about isolation, even though they placed a high value on individualized learning and having the freedom to pursue their own interests. Most student participants described a socially fragmented college that needs to become more knowledgeable about issues of diversity. As a third-year student from outside the Northeast noted:

> We need a little bit more community. It is such a big word, but people need to get out of their own heads. I do not know if that means compromising the academic program. I do not think it does at all, actually. But we need to find a way to get people out of their own minds and actually go and do something with others. The problem with being passionate about what you have liked your entire life is you do not actually try to experience anything else other than your own interests. I think that is the problem. So, we are dealing with some things right now.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 2

The faculty reiterated that Apple College must work harder to establish stronger social support networks for students. As one faculty member noted:

> A lot of students feel isolated from each other. They find many aspects of student social life here lacking, and I think that is a problem for students. It is possibly driven by the nature of the education, which is very individualized. Also there are no teams or no groups that unite or bring together the campus. I think social life is a challenge.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 17

Theme Four: Countercultural Ideals

Apple's educational values run counter to the more career-oriented and commercially-driven higher education institutions in three major ways. First, Apple community members value undergraduate education as intellectual exploration rather than solely for vocational training. Second, the participants believe that colleges should encourage students to address the problems facing the world, as opposed to fulfilling their own selfish needs or acquiring personal material wealth. Third, the

faculty and students believe that colleges should challenge students' preconceived worldviews, as opposed to creating artificially "neutral" classrooms that do not challenge individuals' commonly held values, ethics, and beliefs systems. The growing resistance to alternative forms of undergraduate education in the current social and educational climate makes it difficult for countercultural liberal arts colleges, like Apple, to continue to contradict the current practices of the higher education system (Nelson, 2007).

A number of participants discussed the challenge of attracting students who are interested in an individualized curriculum that does not focus on vocational preparation but rather on learner responsibility for a sustainable world. According to one faculty member who has served Apple College for more than 15 years, the Apple's current students continue to hold countercultural values. He stated:

> Most of the students I see are not interested in an Apple education when it becomes a pre-professional education. They are willing to let anxiety rule the roost, and not try to prepare themselves for a particular job, and just wait and see how things are going to turn out, which is a great advantage as far as their risk-taking goes, and as far as their curiosity goes.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 21

Students, faculty, and administrators expressed concern over the growing materialism and selfishness of institutions of higher education and society as a whole. One of the faculty, who has been at Apple for more than two decades, described how Apple must combat this trend educationally. She stated:

> Another challenge for Apple is to try to sell the idea that what constitutes success is doing some sort of good for the world as opposed to making a lot of money or climbing up some of these corporate ladders and some of these academic ladders. It is a harder and harder sell, because this country is so glued to the idea that making money and being famous is all that

> matters…That might require you to get outside yourself into different communities and do some good while you are at it. Why not? You might be doing research for your thesis, but why not do some good while you are at it? I think we are more and more at the point where we better start getting onto that whole idea that education is for doing something to save the world.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 6

According to one faculty member, the main problem facing higher education is a "me mentality" taking hold in students and parents. Everything is geared toward the consumers, and institutions of higher education fail to challenge worldviews or expect students to learn outside of their comfort zone. He elaborated:

> It is a precarious moment for liberal arts institutions, other than those with huge endowments. Everybody else is so vulnerable to the utilitarian mentality. That kind of thought is taking over. In a sense, the academy itself, other than for social justice, does not really have any kind of moral or ethical standing. I am saying we [The academy] have kind of contributed to this predicament that suddenly we find ourselves in at the current moment where more and more we have this corporate model for the universities.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 14

Furthermore, in addition to finding students who appreciate Apple's denunciation of materialism and commitment to global sustainability, the institution also needs to attract families who share Apple's values for undergraduate education. A second-year student noted that for Apple to succeed, it needs to also appeal to the families of perspective students. He explained:

> In order for a student to end up at Apple, at some point the possibility of going to a place like Apple has to have been made available to him or her. But in some way or another, everyone had parents who were willing for their student to go to an institution like this. So, the phenomenon of students being at Apple is also a phenomenon of families sending their kids to Apple.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 20

Theme Five: Financial Resources

The Apple model of self-directed education is very expensive, because it necessitates the ability of all students to work individually with faculty on their course projects as well as their independent work during their final year. As noted earlier, Apple College is tuition dependent, receiving around 80% of its revenues from tuition charges. Part of this reliance on tuition is due to the small institutional endowment (below $50 million) and a relatively young alumni base. Although the current president expanded the resources of the advancement operations and hired additional development staff, fundraising remains a challenge. He notes that it is difficult to raise money in an economic environment where people have greater uncertainty about their retirement and healthcare costs. He noted, moreover, finding that a greater percentage of parents are sending their children to private schools, as opposed to public elementary and secondary schools. These schools are directly competing for dollars the alumni might otherwise be inclined to give to Apple College.

Financial resources relate to nearly every challenge Apple faces. In particular, Apple needs additional resources to hire more full-time faculty to support self-directed learning. As noted earlier, the educational system at Apple necessitates high levels of student-faculty interaction. Faculty relationships with students provide essential support for the students' intellectual development and aid in students' progress on independent work. Apple's decision-makers must balance the financial necessity of maximizing enrollment with the faculty's ability to offer an individualized learning experience for the students. Although Apple's financial position has allowed for additional faculty, participants seemed convinced that the institution needs even more

full-time faculty to maintain the personal attention that students need and expect. A recently appointed faculty member explained the dilemma of over resources in this way:

> Enrollment is essential because we do not have a huge endowment. Maintaining high enrollment also means that you can do some things that otherwise you cannot do. At the same time, you cannot have it much higher, because then you lose what the college is about. It is a very hard question. I mean, the easiest answer would be to get a larger endowment to hire more faculty and to improve the faculty, which may be unobtainable. But, I think ultimately if you want to have a certain type of college, and you do not want to change it too much, you have to really focus on building an endowment.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 15

In sum, Apple's participants discussed challenges that fit into five major themes. First, the challenge of communicating the relevance of liberal arts education for the twenty-first century confronts Apple, just as it does other liberal arts colleges. However, Apple takes a self-directed approach to liberal arts education that distinguishes the institution from other—more traditional—liberal arts colleges and resonates with a special type of student. Communicating how Apple's vision for undergraduate education helps students meet their goals, given the changes in contemporary society, poses a major challenge for the institution.

Second, Apple must contend with the changing attitudes and learning styles of the current generation of traditional-aged college students. The college must determine how to ensure sufficient structures exist to safeguard the quality of the educational experience, without stifling the flexibility of the curricula.

Third, the self-directed nature of the curricula poses a challenge to promoting social interaction between students. Apple needs to take greater advantage of its small

residential enrollment to get more students involved in campus organizations. Apple has the ability to offer a greater percentage of the student body opportunities for leadership in campus organizations than students might find at larger institutions.

Fourth, the educational ideals of Apple fit well into the philosophy of liberal arts education, as the students are less materialistic, intrinsically motivated to learn, and interested careers that address issues of global sustainability. Apple must appeal to more career-oriented students while resisting the utilitarian and material minded mentality that supports an exclusively vocationally-focused and commercially-oriented model of higher education.

Finally, financial resources determine the future survival of Apple and other countercultural liberal arts colleges. Raising the necessary resources for Apple depends first on stable enrollments for tuition revenue, but also on external funding from private giving. The challenge for Apple and other countercultural liberal arts colleges rests in growing an endowment from donors who do not pressure the institution to compromise their liberal arts philosophy by implementing a more commercially-oriented model of higher education.

Apple College is working to address particular issues that threaten the continuation of their mission. The administration has made a significant effort to get campus stakeholders involved in diagnosing and addressing institutional challenges through the distribution of ADD1 and ADD2 and a renewed emphasis on assessment and planning.

The emphasis on self-examination was noted in my discussions with a number of faculty, students, and administrators. The senior academic affairs officer described a change in institutional culture with regard to assessment. He noted:

> Apple opened in a kind of period where there was no culture of assessment. You did not so much look at yourself in these studies and try to adapt. Well the attitude of we know what works was more the dominant attitude, and at Apple in particular. Apple developed a tendency to be insular, especially as you entered a more conservative era and the number of experimental and non-traditional schools declined. You had this notion of we are special, and therefore, you cannot compare us to anywhere else, and if you are pointing to something at Apple that may be troubling you had to reference it as something in the wider world. Now we are beginning to collaborate with other liberal arts colleges to improve our educational practices. There is also more internal assessment and questioning of how we do things at Apple.
>
> -Apple College Interviewee 16

Summary of Results from Apple College

Apple College has a short institutional history compared to most American institutions of higher education. Apple opened in the early 1970s to reform undergraduate education and expand access to liberal arts education. The institution filled a void in the diversity of American higher education opportunity by providing traditional-aged college students with a self-directed curricular structure that focused on interdisciplinary and inquiry-based learning. For Apple's students, projects often replaced courses, and portfolios replaced letter grades as determinants of academic progress. Aspects of Apple's educational program have become more widespread among other institutions of higher education, such as the option to develop an individualized major. Thus, in order to safeguard the relevance and distinctiveness of its education program, Apple must continue to reexamine and reform itself.

Changes at Apple have been mostly minimal over the last few decades. The participants discussed three significant changes. First, the change from independent projects to elective courses in the first year curricula. The curricular change to Division One remains controversial as Apple's faculty attempt to achieve the proper balance between structure and flexibility in their curricula. Second, Apple has managed to grow enrollment through larger entering classes and a major increase in student persistence to graduation, which some of the participants attributed to the better preparation students receive from the new first-year curricula for their final years of study. Lastly, faculty and administrators described the differences between Apple's new generation of faculty and the faculty who came to the institution around the time of its opening. Participants from Apple's founding generation of faculty believed that the heightened attention to research in Apple's recent generation of faculty enhances the quality of the undergraduate educational experience, and most faculty reported valuing the interdisciplinary nature of the curricula as well as the flexibility to teach almost any course in their area of expertise. Apple's junior faculty, however, seem to be less comfortable with the use of narrative evaluations and the paucity of course pre-requisites.

Apple College currently holds a strong institutional position with record numbers of students enrolling and persisting to graduation than in recent decades. The institution continues to attract quality faculty interested in supporting an interdisciplinary and self-directed curriculum within the boundaries of liberal arts education. Despite recent successes, Apple's students, faculty, and administrators

identified a number of challenges facing liberal arts education at their institution, such as communicating externally the relevance of their curricula, helping traditional age college students to succeed as self-directed learners, integrating students socially, upholding a liberal arts education tradition, and securing financial support. To address these challenges, Apple's president has engaged the campus in a discussion to define the shared institutional values and then to develop processes for identifying and responding to educational, sociological, philosophical, and economical threats to Apple's educational mission. Apple provides an excellent example of how cooperation and strong leadership among students, faculty, and administrators helps countercultural liberal arts colleges to sustain liberal arts education in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS FROM MAPLE COLLEGE

During the Second World War, Maple's founder taught college courses to American soldiers in France. He developed a strong conviction that American higher education needed a college for what Knowles (1980) would later refer to as the self-directed learner. In this new college, learning would take place "mind to mind" between faculty and student (Pope, 2006). Maple's founder believed that a more egalitarian and democratically-based college would better motivate and nurture a student's intellectual growth. In this environment, the goal was to make academic learning inseparable from the social community where it occurs.

After the war, a number of returning veterans helped to establish Maple College. To make this college a reality, Maple's founder donated his farm, which included a few barns and a farmhouse. In planning the college, he solicited the help of a number of great intellectual thinkers of that time, including a major poet, an ambassador, and a leader of the Smithsonian Institution. The fledgling college benefited from the passage of the *Serviceman's Readjustment Act (1944)*—i.e., the G.I. Bill—which offered millions of veterans the financial support to attend college. Maple appealed to GI's who wanted the freedom and responsibility to design their education. Initially, the G.I. Bill provided the necessary enrollments and financial resources to support the college in its early years.

The early veterans who enrolled at Maple received a number of rights and responsibilities that remain foreign to students attending colleges back then, and even today. For example, Maple College's idea that students should share the responsibility

of governing the social policies of community with faculty and administrators challenged the traditional power structures of higher education. The founders of the college modeled the campus as a self-governing community, based upon the New England tradition of town hall governance. At the town hall meetings, all have the opportunity to voice their concerns and vote on organizational policies and actions.

Today at Maple, students continue to vote along with faculty and staff on important issues, such as social policy and funding for campus activities. Perhaps even more distinctive, students have voting representation on committees that review faculty performance, faculty hiring, and student discipline. Moreover, Maple's commitment to the egalitarian community minimizes hierarchical structures among students and faculty. For example, students and faculty are on a first name basis, and although they award tenure, the college has disavowed the typical faculty rank system (e.g., assistant, associate, or full professor) as a way to unite faculty, and minimize status differences. Finally, Maple welcomes students as trusted members of the college community. For example, students have full access to social and academic buildings 24 hours a day. So, if students want to go to the library and check out a book at 3:30 a.m. (when there are no staff around), they simply take responsibility to sign a card at the circulation desk.

Given its uniquely egalitarian campus culture, Maple attracts students who seek greater responsibility and respect from their educational institution. Moreover, students interested in Maple often exhibit a motivation to shape their own educational experience and study in an environment that nurtures their interpersonal growth and

intellectual curiosity. Clearly, most traditional college students would not be ready for the community and educational responsibilities that distinguish Maple's institutional culture. Although Maple attracts highly motivated and responsible students, the college enrolls students from a wide array of academic backgrounds, accepting five out of every eight applicants. For example, only one in three students are in the top tenth of their high school class, but nearly all (97%) are in the top half. In addition to traditional first-time freshmen, around 20% of new enrollees enter as transfer students looking for greater opportunities for self-directed learning with less organizational hierarchy.

Maple excels at preparing students for education beyond the baccalaureate degree, as around 70% of Maple graduates attend professional or graduate school within five years of graduation. Moreover, Maple ranks among the top institutions of higher education in the percentage of graduates who go on to earn Ph.D.'s in the life sciences (among institutions like California Institute of Technology, University of Chicago, and Reed College). Maple places in the top 20 institutions for the percentage of graduates who go on to earn Ph.D.'s in religion and philosophy, as well as in mathematics and computer science. In addition to becoming successful professors, researchers, writers, scientists, poets, artists, and doctors, Maple graduates have served as editors of prestigious newspapers, such as, the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* (Pope, 2006). Most Maple alumni find employment in non-profit organizations, and over half make a donation of some kind to Maple each year. Thus,

Maple achieves an alumni giving rate on par with the most elite liberal arts colleges and Ivy League institutions.

The transformational effect that Maple has on students is rather profound. Pope (1996, 2000, 2006) noted that Maple and other countercultural liberal arts colleges transformed students with less than perfect high school performance into college graduates who ended up academically comparable to the graduates' of the nation's most selective colleges. Pope described colleges that achieved this level of cognitive and affective growth as "value added" institutions. A long time faculty member commented on Maple's ability to educationally transform students who seemed of average ability. She explained:

> What struck me when I came here was…that my prior teaching experience had been, that there was very little difference in the abilities of the students who came and the students who left the undergraduate program, it is not that they had not changed, but the change in the students was not as dramatic in some instances as I saw at Maple. I saw students who sometimes came in as quite poor students and went out as really quite excellent students. And so, that was very exciting, though also it was a lot of work for me. It is less work if a student comes in as an excellent student and just kind of coasts along. It is incredibly rewarding to see someone who changes so tremendously.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 14

The setting that prepares such a high percentage of students for future education looks austere compared to the lavish facilities at most institutions. Maple presents an amalgamation of modest white clapboard structures and modern buildings. There is only one paved road on campus and few amenities that most American students would expect, such as cable television or a food court with brand name dining options. Maple's competitive advantage resonates from its superior ability to promote cognitive and affective development through an institutional environment that offers a

highly supportive intellectual community, egalitarian governance, and a personalized curriculum.

The shared values of Maple's participants informed their viewpoints of organizational change and their perceptions of threats facing their college. I now present the results from the case of Maple by first describing themes that surfaced as participants discussed their institutional ideals. Then, I describe themes of organizational change in relationship to participant values. Finally, I present challenge-oriented themes facing the college and highlight selected institutional efforts to address various challenges.

Maple's Values for Liberal Arts Education

Maple has a number of strongly held organizational values, aimed at promoting academic and social growth in their students. According to the study's participants, curricular and community values intend to support personal development. I discuss each of the values beginning with the themes mostly related to the curriculum, and move to values that support the Maple community ideal.

Theme One: Self-Directed Learning

Maple fosters self-directed learning through a set of curricula that provide the flexibility for learners to plan, carry out, and evaluate their own learning. Students enroll at Maple because self-directed learning gives learners the ability to pursue their own educational interests, autonomously. Furthermore, it requires that learners reflect critically on the influence of historical, social, and cultural, constructions on knowledge (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 2000). The independent-focus and rigorous

nature of Maple's curricula necessitates that students possess high personal responsibility orientations (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991), which means that they not only learn autonomously but that they take "ownership for their thoughts and actions" (p. 26).

Perhaps the best example of how Maple requires students to take ownership of their learning experience is through "the plan." Maple expects all students to design an independent final project over the course of their last two years of study, referred to as the plan. In this project, students must take full responsibility for getting their research plans approved, gathering data, and defending them to a group of faculty and an outside evaluator. Ultimately, this project serves as the culmination of their self-designed concentration of courses.

Self-directed learning suggests a key process by which Maple's students achieve dramatic academic and personal growth. One faculty member described Maple's curriculum as having greater flexibility for learners with a deep understanding of themselves and a willingness to broaden their interests. He elaborated:

> It is pretty uncommon to have a liberal art college with no real distribution requirements. We try to get students to study broadly which is one of our goals as a liberal arts institution, but we do not say you must take an art class, you must take a humanities class, or you must take a science class. We do not force them, through requirements, to study broadly. The other thing is that we do not have majors, but what we have is the Plan of Concentration. So, what we have are degree fields and those frequently correspond with what you would see as a major at other schools. The Plan of Concentration allows students to really parcel out and structure their own course of study. There is a lot of flexibility in how you can approach a particular topic. Say you want to study environmental sustainability and you can look at that through a chemistry perspective, or you can even look at it through a historical perspective, or as an economist, if you want to look at it from an economic perspective. There are all these different ways that you can approach that subject and you can even

> combine them. There is just a lot of flexibility that we can offer to students who take the initiative and the time to think about how they want to approach their topic. There is a lot of flexibility, but our job is to make sure that it meets the academic requirements. A few students come here with the idea that basically you can do whatever you want, and we worked very hard to discourage that idea. You still have to take the foundation courses and do the advanced coursework, but if you are willing to do that then there is a lot of flexibility.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 4

A second year student stressed the importance of flexibility in designing his own learning. He benefited from the flexibility to focus his learning in areas that interested him. He noted:

> The fact that there is more independent study and the fact that there is more flexibility in academics than at most other schools is important. At Maple you can specifically focus on what you really want to do. You are not just taking these required classes for a degree. Also the junior and senior years are more focused. It is more independent study. You are going to set up your own tutorials where you are pretty much running the show and you are developing your own ideas and interests in the classes, and it is more flexible.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 9

Several faculty discussed Maple's role in encouraging students' personal growth. For example, one faculty member believed that the student-centered nature of the curriculum contributed to students' transformation. He explained:

> With its small size, it is able to be a student-centered program. I think that education in this environment maximizes the potential for education as a transforming experience. And also for the cultivation of voice and critical thinking, and a sense of what is larger than yourself, particularly in terms of community being larger than yourself. Because, Maple is so small, it involves you whether you like it or not.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 21

Over their course of study, Maple students learn to critically examine power structures and exercise their voice. The consequences of this kind of education tend to produce learners who find it difficult to fit within conventional organizational

structures once they graduate (Hooks, 1994; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The reason students who engage in critical reflection find it difficult to mesh with traditional graduate programs and the world of work is because most organizations have clear lines of authority and do not appreciate new employees or students questioning their authorities or the practices of an organization (Brookfield, 2000). Moreover, graduates of Maple find traditional graduate programs and employers less flexible. For example, students in traditional graduate programs often must conduct their adviser's research and fulfill a set of predetermined courses. In the work place new employees often do not get to negotiate the duties of their positions. Although life beyond a countercultural liberal arts college may be challenging, graduates' self-reliance and critical thinking skills provide creativity, which provides an advantage in the world of work or graduate school. Another faculty member explains the effects of self-directed learning at Maple. He said:

> The nature of the plan of concentration allows students to test themselves by reaching beyond their grasp. Essentially, it expects students to be self-reliant and to be self-directed and to make a number of decisions along the way. And to learn accountability in a fairly individually specific way by standing with outside examiners who do not know them and to have their work assessed independently that way. It becomes an exposure to the real world. It becomes a self-actualizing experience, where if you succeed you have no one to credit but yourself ultimately. You can thank your mentors, and it also teaches the value of mentorship, which is very important in any endeavor they are likely to encounter shortly after graduation. So in all of those ways Maple is helpful. I think to the extent that it encourages independent voice and critical thinking, it may handicap them in a lot of jobs that are traditionally available in what tend to be fairly hierarchical corporate structures, where they will not have the same opportunities for their own individual expression. So they will tend to be self-directed, and their later lives do not necessarily neatly fit into structures that demand conformity. At the same time, they will be good participants in a democracy, because they will understand more about the importance of due process leading to an end. And the importance of having decentralized access

> to decision-making and things like that. So, that will make them effective citizens and give them their best shot in a very difficult endeavor of forging their own path career-wise in a world that is becoming more and more difficult.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 21

Another faculty member, appointed at Maple about two decades ago, believes that Maple's self-directed curriculum appeals to a particular type of learner—a learner who is interested in social action, not just an education. Many of the students are looking to make the world a better place. She explained:

> Students often come to Maple with the dream of crafting their own education. And in other instances that carries over into life beyond Maple, where they often have the dream of being a potter, or a painter, or a poet, or work in social work, or law, or business, but for a good cause. And some, you know go on and do not pursue academic aspects at all. And in some cases as a teacher, I wish they would.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 14

Learner Responsibility. The practice of self-directed learning requires a great deal of responsibility on the part of learners (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). The study's participants highlighted the importance of students taking responsibility for their learning at Maple, given that students must design their own course of study (including two years of work on a major independent project). These projects require a great deal of maturity on the part of traditional aged college students, but they also allow them a great deal freedom and flexibility in crafting their total Maple experience.

Unfortunately, not all students possess the maturity necessary to take on the enormous responsibility that Maple's self-directed curricula require, and therefore, a majority of Maple's entering students eventually either take time off to gain more life

experience or fail to graduate. Most of Maple's students fit the definition of traditional college age (i.e., under 24 years of age), yet educational researchers insist that self-directed learning best suits adult learners, who have the past experience and maturity to guide their own program of study (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Moreover, the scholarship on adult learning confirms that adults prefer to learn in a self-directed environment, whereas traditional aged college students often prefer a greater degree of structure and external direction (Knowles, 1980; Knowles & Associates, 1984). Malcolm Knowles (1980) presented the concept of "andragogy" to distinguish adult learners from children and adolescent learners (i.e., "pedagogy"). A number of the key assumptions behind "andragogy" fit the expectations Maple has for its students, including: having a self-directed nature, challenging one's past knowledge through experience, using a problem-centered—as opposed to a subject-centered—approach, and being intrinsically motivated to learn. Thus, although the literature suggests that traditional aged college students may not be ready for the rigor of Maple's academic curricula, students who succeed at Maple often possess a level of self-reliance and dedication that would be somewhat unusual among traditional age students at other institutions. Therefore, for the students who can manage it, Maple's curriculum offers a demanding, yet flexible and personally fulfilling experience.

The senior enrollment officer noted that students often choose Maple because they want to be responsible for their learning and wish to participate in a self-governing community. He explained:

> This is very much the kind of academic model where students are asked to take responsibility for their education. That has to inform what we do at the front

> end in a big way, because we are looking for students who are what you might call academic self-starters, people who are self-reliant, who are not intimidated by a close one-on-one relationship with faculty, and a very informal kind of way. Everybody at the college is on a first name basis, and some students really want that. But there are other students who find that kind of unnerving. They would rather be anonymous in a classroom of 35 than be known in a class of 8.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 18

Students at Maple spent an inordinate amount of time discussing the high degree of learner responsibility that the college expects. A third-year student from out-of-state argues that the high level of student accountability promotes student growth. She elaborated, "We are more independently responsible for our actions. We do have to determine what we are interested in and exactly what classes we want to take to support what we want to do. It has to be what we want in life, and that is good" (Maple Interview 8). Students not only have to take responsibility for their academics but for their roles in governing the college. A long-time faculty member explained:

> Learner responsibility is exceedingly high and because they have it, they grow into it. They are on community court [the discipline system], they are on the faculty review board, and they are everywhere where important decisions are made. And we know each other very well. If a student cuts class, I see them in the dining hall. There is no place really to hide here. You make a mistake, and you have to correct it. You have to live through it.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 5

The senior academic affairs officer noted that the ability of Maple to provide a self-directed education to traditional age college students rested mostly on the students' ability to take responsibility. The students who come to Maple without understanding this concept of self-reliance are not going to be successful because they will fail to realize the personal commitment necessary to succeed in Maple's self-

directed curriculum. Finding matured 18 year-olds can be a challenge for any college, but it is essential for Maple. The senior academic affairs officer explains:

> So if you are asking me if what we say about ourselves plays out in practice. Yes, but to an extent it really depends upon the student's ability to grasp the possibilities here. If a student comes with little or no real understanding of what we mean by 'you can do whatever you want' for example if this means I can party all day and all night and not show up for class, clearly that won't work, It is all about academics. It is all about doing your work. It is all about learning something in a framework. And then once you have got it, you can do whatever you want, but that is not necessarily clear at the outset to an 18 year old.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 3

Initiative. Maple's emphasis on self-directed learning requires students to take initiative to monitor their social and academic performance. Initiative requires the psychological readiness to self-monitor. In addition to self-monitoring, students need enterprise or more specifically the diligence and ingenuity to persistently work toward their learning goals (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Maple students must take action to set goals and monitor their progress through the curriculum. One long-time faculty member described the constant negotiation process, which students at Maple have to go through. He elaborated:

> Maple prepares them to negotiate through bureaucracy because they have to find a plan sponsor, and they have to fill out all these forms. They have to pass a writing requirement, and then they have to make statements. The college is becoming much more bureaucratic than even what it was when I first got here. So, they fill out a final plan application, which goes through the curriculum committee. If they are going to do research, it goes to the research review committee. So, that they are continually negotiating, if they are negotiating student aid, they do it through a bureau, and if they are trying to get a certain room in a certain dorm, they go through a bureau. So, they are continually negotiating through a small community that is also a bureaucracy. And since the entire country is what I call occupations of bureaucracy, it is training and it gives one a sense of what it is like when you get into the workday world and you have supervisors, and you have things that you have to do. And so, they

> get a lot of experience to the extent they take part in politics. They go to the town meeting, or they serve on community committees. Those committees are staffed by staff and faculty, who on one level are teachers and on one level are bureaucrats who communicate the terms of success and failure in the college to the students. So, they have to negotiate through this very complex set of committees, staff relations, faculty relations, campus wide politics, issues about smoking, drinking, drugging that are discussed in town meetings. Resolutions are made and they get to participate in the politics through which a community runs itself. Then they see all of the outside forces coming in and trying to define assessment and accreditation. That is to say, a small school trying to survive by competing with other small schools for funds, students, credibility, and this outside society that would basically like to come and regulate the college to death, regarding all sorts of things. So the students become aware of this, not only in their own trajectory through the educational process, but through their political liking and social and cultural liking of the school.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 12

The students at Maple really emphasize the importance of personal ownership in learning and negotiating the college bureaucracy. Students must plan ahead to ensure achievement of their personal learning goals. A third-year student elaborated on the relationship that students must have with the faculty and the institution:

> No one is going to come to you and ask you if you want to do this. You have to know what you want to do and speak up if you want them to help you. We have academic advisors, but they are not telling us what to do or telling us what to take. They are like more of a guide. That is why you need self-motivation, you pick your own path, and people help you once you are on it.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 1

Engaged Learning. Swaner (2007) noted that students who are more actively involved in their college learning experiences are more likely to garner a higher level of developmental outcomes. However, the responsibility of creating an engaged learning environment relies not only on the student, but also on the institution to provide a curricula and campus culture that are both conducive to involvement (Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991). Maple participants not only discuss the institutional support

structures and expectations for students to be engaged in learning opportunities, but the intensity that Maple's students bring personally to the learning process. As one student elaborated:

> Maple is just a more intense and fulfilling program. It is hard. You learn more at Maple than you learn, I think, as far as I know, anywhere else. Maple does this by expecting more from you, by taking for granted that you want to be here so you are going to apply yourself all the way. People here want to learn. Ideally the professors know what we are capable of and they push us. You have to be able to focus. You need to love what you are doing; otherwise it is just too much. You also need support.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 8

A faculty member noted that the small Maple community does not offer students the chance to disengage. She stated:

> The student's role in classes is speaking, they cannot hide behind newspapers or computer screens in the thirteenth row with eyes glued to the ceiling of a huge amphitheatre. They are 1 of 10 who are speaking. Again, I think it goes back to community; there is such a huge role in fostering community.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 14

Maple's curricula offer students the unique opportunity to craft their own educational experience. However, to fully take advantage of this program of study, students must demonstrate an unusual level of responsibility, initiative, and engagement in their own learning. This has proven problematic for some traditional aged college students, who lack the experience, maturity, commitment, and/or ability to meet the demands put forth by the institution. For those who meet these demands, the cognitive and affective outcomes are tremendous.

Theme Two: Problem-Based Learning

Barrows (1996) defines the characteristics of problem-based learning as a teaching method where problems provide the focus and stimulus for the learning.

Furthermore, in problem-based learning, teachers serve as facilitators in a student-centered learning environment, and learning occurs independently or in small groups. At Maple, students develop an ability to formulate solutions to problems and reflect on their progress in both their independent work and in small seminar classes. Learning focuses on student-determined research problems and faculty serve as facilitators who assist students in the development and process of solving their academic problems. Maple's faculty noted that, to solve any problem, students first needed to determine the questions to be answered. One of Maple's senior faculty explained the problem-based nature of students as they engage in their plan projects. She explained:

> Being on plan requires students to see if they are asking the right questions, answering those questions, watching how long it takes to do something, and see if they are making progress in their abilities to conceptualize quickly. They practice defending themselves orally with other people, and we make them do it. So they developed a set of oral skills. I have a senior seminar where all the seniors present their work to each other and critique each other. I think that capacity to solve a problem that you yourself have formulated is valuable, but it is a terrible responsibility, because they have to formulate the problem, and then they have to figure out different ways to solve it. Then they have to articulate the solution to that problem in their plan work, by what they write or by the project that they do. And there are a lot of ways that would help you at a job anywhere. For my students, most of them who have wanted to go on to graduate school were able to do it.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 5

Critical Thinking. The ability to think critically and question assumptions is an important aspect of the learning process (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 2000), and serves as an important component of problem-based learning. In order to find solutions, students must critically analyze the problem at hand and arrive at novel solutions. Maple's curriculum encourages skepticism of conventional educational, social, and political structures. Moreover, the nature of independent work and the

small discussion-oriented classes nurture critical thinking skills. A faculty member, appointed to Maple about a decade ago, describes how the college stresses critical thinking and critical reflection:

> A lot of our students are interested in going on to some further form of education, graduate school or something like that. I would hope that whether they do that or not, that they would have some form of understanding of the importance of thinking independently. One of the things we try to talk to the science students about is that science is based on collecting evidence, and then trying to build a model, and trying to persuade others about how a system works based on the evidence. So, when our students are out in the world reading something that someone presents to them, or hearing something someone presents to them, they do not just take it at face value. They should think about what evidence someone might have for making a particular claim or presenting you with a certain view. So critical thinking is certainly high on our list…We hope students will develop an ability for critical thinking and along with that the ability to read diverse material and apply those critical thinking skills, whether it is scientific articles or novels or other kinds of texts or other sources of information. We hope that they will read those sources, understand what they are about, and evaluate them in some way.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 4

Theme Three: Experiential Learning

The self-directed nature of Maple College's curriculum also promotes learning through experience. John Dewey (1938/1997), an early educational philosopher, noted that all learning comes from experience, yet not all incidents produce learning. For Dewey, the experience must build upon previous experiences by providing something new or different that reshapes the understanding of the learner. Kolb (1984) also argues that all learning begins from experience. His learning cycle model attempts to explain the four abilities required for experiential learning. First, learning begins with a concrete experience in which the learner is open and willing to engage with the event. Second, reflective observation requires the learner to use reflective and

observational skills to inspect the new experience through a variety of perspectives. Third, abstract conceptualization requires analytical abilities that can integrate ideas and concepts from the observations of the experience. Fourth, active experimentation necessitates decision-making and problem-solving skills to determine how new ideas and concepts can be implemented into actual practice. It was clear from a number of participants that experiences have a major impact on how students learn at Maple. One faculty member discussed how he utilizes experiential learning to teach students. He stated:

> I involve students in my own productions. I run a summer program for teenagers emerging to be filmmakers where the [Maple] students become mentors to those teenagers. It has provided opportunities outside of class. The nature of the school and the size of it allow me to integrate my own work with the student's interests and give them opportunities to have hands on production experience. It provides mentorship and leadership [opportunities] and the chance to be in production situations, which they might not normally find.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 21

Experiential learning complements the learning in the classroom. Moreover, the self-directed nature of the students learning at Maple led to a number of life shaping experiences. As one fourth year student explained:

> My plan, you know, my thesis that I am writing here is not a project that I am doing at school that is going to be over, and I am going to move on to something else. This is my way of life. I am studying environmental studies, and I am looking at sustainable agriculture and basically how trees benefit soil fertility. And with the way world agriculture is right now, I feel like, with the things I have learned here and the experiences I have gained here, I am going to be able to go and apply it and teach people about it. And I am interested in going back to Hawaii, and I am working with shade grown coffee there. I have been able to get funding from Maple to take a semester off or a couple of months and go do research and get experience out in the field and work with my hands and talk to the farmers. And then coming back here and putting all those things together just gives you a whole different perspective. Because you can learn about the negative effects of pesticides on soil from books, but

> you can really learn about traditional Hawaiian farming when you farm with the people. I am going to take everything together, make sense of it, write a plan, and basically go back to Hawaii and try and teach people how to farm more sustainably. So, I am really hoping to take the education I gained, which is really amazing, and apply it to practice and really do something with it.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 13

Theme Four: Community

Maple's students, faculty and administrators, described the supportive campus environment as the most cherished aspect of Maple College. The supportiveness of the campus culture resonated with the participants on a personal and intellectual level. Participants tended to attribute the closeness of the community to the size of the college. There are fewer than 500 students enrolled at Maple, and nearly all of them live on campus. The physical setting further engenders closeness in the campus community, as Maple is located on an isolated mountain top. This setting promotes self-reflection as well as an environment where people get to know one another through frequent interaction around campus. There are few distractions away from academics and the campus community. There are also few amenities that most college students would expect, such as an ATM, cable television, or a food court. In the following sections, I elaborate on how Maple fosters a strong sense of community.

At Maple College, internal stakeholders value their connection to each other as learners and as teachers. Student participants expressed the importance of the community atmosphere most explicitly. According to third-year student, the intensity of student engagement in academic work seems to bond the community together. She noted:

> There are some people that would consider their college their home, but at Maple, this is all of our homes, and it is just a totally different experience to have. It really adds something to the whole college experience while trying to be independent as a person and to be growing as a person. It is not only to live on your own in a dorm somewhere else, it is to move where you are in a community where your are invested emotionally and academically. I mean, if you can handle, it is worth it.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 1

Not all students who first come to Maple can handle the intensity of the learning community. One student withdrew from the institution four years ago and moved to Southern California. She left in part because she did not know what she wanted to do with her life, and so she felt unprepared to design her own plan of study. While she was in Southern California, she attended a local community college to continue her education. This experience showed her that she really needed a supportive learning-centered college environment so she looked at a number of liberal arts colleges around the country, but she ended up returning to Maple. She returned to Maple for the atmosphere as well as the curriculum. She explained:

> I did not really interact with the people at the community college, mainly because I felt like it was high school more than college. People were just on their cell phones all the time. They did not really care; there was no class discussion, no interaction between the students. It was just a lecture and then people went and did their stuff. Here, people are a little more connected, not only to each other, but also to their surroundings. We have a little farm here; we try and be green, people care, and get together, and talk about things. And, [at the community college] there was no connection between the students. So, I felt very disconnected from the rest of the population.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 13

In addition to a community commitment to learning, the study's participants lauded the trusting nature of the Maple community. As one first-year student explained:

> The community-like mindset here is something you will not get at a bigger school. It is such a small rural campus and everyone wants to be here and trusts each other so much that the doors are unlocked all the time. I do not even own a key to my room, because I do not even have to think about locking it. And when I go to visit my friends at their schools, I am afraid to leave without locking the door because someone could steal stuff. That is a really powerful statement— that this college is so community oriented and trusting that you can leave stuff unlocked.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 6

Collaborative Learning. Sanford (1962) first examined the link between students' college environment and their successful transition from adolescence to adulthood. He argued that colleges could best promote learning and development by providing an environment with both high level challenges and strong social supports. Pope (1996, 2000, 2006) argued that institutions that transform undergraduates strive to create collaborative learning as opposed to competitive learning environments. In countercultural liberal arts colleges the collaborative learning both inside and outside the classroom often contributes immensely to student development. The competition to learn rests on intrinsic satisfaction rather than surpassing the work of other students. Even though the students at Maple engage in a great deal of independent work, courses are discussion-based, and the students are very passionate about learning from one another. A third-year student from Long Island, New York describes the value of interacting with students who are "resident experts." She explained:

> You need to engage with the entire community. You need to develop relationships with students, teachers, with administrators. You need to use your fellow students to your advantage. Use them as a resource as much as you use faculty. If I have a question in my reading, the first thing I do is talk to a friend, not look it up on Wikipedia. I ask, 'What does this make you think? What does this remind you of?' Or even sometimes, 'Can you explain this to

> me?' There are definitely students I know in almost every field, so I know students I can go to and ask for information. It is like we have resident experts.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 8

The students at Maple have a passion for intellectual discussions. Another third-year student discussed how learning transcends the classroom. She explained:

> Having classes where you just get to hear everybody's opinion on everything and what everybody else got out of it is really important, because I have learned as much from students here as I have from faculty. One of the big jokes for people that come to visit Maple is what we do for fun. We sit around and talk about existentialism because it is true, we discuss what we learn. Well, it is just so different than high school, in the sense that I was just learning things for the test, and here you are learning things because you actually want to know them. And what we are learning in the classroom does not end in a classroom. It goes everywhere. Students are talking to other students in other classes about what they are learning. Their intellectual pursuits and their ideas, I mean, it is huge because these are the people that you are stuck with day in and day out— especially, in the winter when there is a blizzard for three weeks and everyone is just sitting grumpy in the common room arguing about philosophy. I mean that is just part of how we are here.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 1

Student-Faculty Relationships. Maple's students form close relationships with faculty and staff, as they work together to govern the college through committees and town hall style meetings. With the student-faculty ratio of around eight students to each faculty member, learners have plenty of opportunities to form close personal relationships with faculty. Knowing the faculty on campus serves the pragmatic function of allowing them to select the experts whom can best advise their independent projects. However, the connections that students make with faculty give them the confidence to ask questions and participate frequently in their small discussion-based classes. In discussion-based seminars students engage each other

intellectually in debates that do not end in the classroom, but often carry over to the cafeteria and the residence halls.

Astin (1993) found high levels of student-faculty interaction to be the best predictor of student development and persistence. The factors that promote relationships between students and faculty at Maple seem to be the self-directed curriculum, small class sizes, and ratio of one faculty to eight students. Student relationships with faculty were one of the most important aspects of community life for a number of participants. One faculty member explained that knowing her students on a more personal level allows her to help students make greater connections to the subject matter. She explained:

> I have the most interesting personal conversations with people who I have gotten to work with each semester and you come to get a sense of who they are as a whole person, to know the places that they went or have a conversation about loss and suffering. For example, I knew a student and I knew that she just lost a sister. So, teaching about suffering was no longer on the abstract level. It was immediate, and the conversation about the consolation of philosophy took on a whole different meaning. And that I find incredibly rewarding. We are part of the *Colleges that Change Lives*, and that is part of what makes teaching at Maple so fabulous. We allow people the opportunities to achieve fullness of being, and that is because we know each other well enough, and the students will challenge me if they think I am teaching a feminist theory class, and I have been way too easy on the girls in the class, I will hear about. If I am teaching queer theory and the students think that I have been way too easy on the queers and transgendered, they are going to let me know about it. We hold ourselves accountable because we know one another as human beings. And that is a fabulous thing.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 2

Students also feel close to faculty. One third-year student highlighted the egalitarian nature of the learning environment and argued that learning in the small discussions really promotes a learning community. She explained:

> At this college we are definitely a lot closer to our faculty. We call faculty by their first names. There is no professor, there is no Dr., and it is just Gloria, or Stan or someone else. As silly as it sounds, it really does make a difference, and just the way that the classes are set up in a discussion format…you really get to know everyone very well, including the professors. They are not afraid to share things about their personal lives, they are not afraid to tell you about their experiences, which is really encouraging and brings you closer to them.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 17

Another third-year student believed that Maple provides a distinctive student-faculty experience. She explained how this relationship promoted learning and the less formal nature of student-faculty relationships. She explained:

> I think the faculty experience here is really different; we call teachers by their first name. I have many of my teacher's cell phone numbers and home phone numbers, and I have been to a lot of my professor's houses for dinner. It is just that everything is so small, and the classes are so small, it is just a few kids. And really, it helps us form relationships with faculty who are teachers and friends, which is really helpful because this place can get really overwhelming. And you can approach any faculty and say you are having a problem in this class, and they will help you because they know you, and they know your work, and they understand what you are trying to say to them. It is really important to the learning process to have that kind of relationship with the teacher. I mean they facilitate learning just as much as they give us vast knowledge. They help us figure things out on our own through facilitating small discussion and they encouraged us to talk to each other. The students talk more than the professors do in class. That is really important, doing things yourself. You learn them, you remember them, and they are all really outstanding at that.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 1

To return to the story of the senior student who returned to Maple after four years of living in Southern California, she indeed contrasted the faculty relationships she was able to have at Maple with the community college she attended in California. For her, the size and structure of the curriculum at Maple allowed for much deeper relationships with faculty. She illuminates that strong relationships with faculty greatly helped her to achieve her learning goals. She elaborated:

> The professors here are so amazing, and so knowledgeable, and so dedicated to really helping students get to where they need to go… I am going to be connected to this place for the rest of my life, because it has changed me, and it has enabled me to do really amazing things. And if I was anywhere else, and I am talking universities, community colleges, there is absolutely no way that I would be where I am today. The fact that people took their time and believed in me and really helped me along the way has been such an amazing experience. [For example] Calling my plan sponsors over the summer from Hawaii and being like 'how do you put this microscope up? Help.' And them taking 15 to 20 minutes to sit there and talk to you…he answered the phone every single time. He always responded to e-mails. I feel like that probably happens very rarely, and wherever it does, it is probably in settings like Maple. Even at the community college, I was the only person who asked questions, and the professors knew my name, and they gave me a little bit of extra time, but not as much as I needed. Because personally, I know that for me to learn, I need to be one-on-one. And I need to be like, wait, what does this mean again. And really get it explained and have the time to think about it. That is just what the professors do here.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 13

Maple's faculty also substantiated the importance of understanding the different learning styles that work best for their students. Maple's instructors have the opportunity to personalize instruction in a way that maximizes the learning of their students. A senior academic affairs officer, who spent many years on the faculty and still teaches courses, described how deeper relationships with students allowed her to better modify her teaching to meet their needs:

> My constant interaction with students means that the curriculum is always in flux. I talk to them, and listen to them, and try, and fail, and then I say okay well that did not work, I will do something different. So everyone [on the faculty] goes through the same experience, you got your courses and then you got your tutorials. The tutorials one-on-one with a student are really about focusing in on that student and that student's interest while at the same time, they [the faculty] are learning and relearning their same discipline and teaching it to a single student and seeing how it works and then making modifications.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 3

Egalitarianism. By examining Maple's academic and social milieu, it becomes clear that the institution puts less emphasis on organizational hierarchy or positions of power than a typical institution of higher education. The community encourages students to participate in the governance of both their learning and the college as a whole, which changes the social dynamics of the campus culture. For example, students, faculty, and staff have an equal vote at the town hall meetings, where a number of non-curricular governing issues are discussed and decided. Moreover, students hold the majority vote on the student judicial committee and have multiple votes in faculty search and review committees. These democratic ideals emerge from the founding traditions of Maple College, and continue to represent one of the more distinctive aspects of the institution.

After two decades at Maple, one faculty member recalls the contrast between her personal experience in a hierarchical (top-down governance) organization of her graduate program and Maple's egalitarian structure:

> What struck me when I came here, coming from a fairly large and very hierarchal graduate program at a major university, was the community between the faculty and students and staff, there was not this incredible hierarchy that you felt at the University. That students are involved in everything from hiring new faculty, to reviewing faculty, to admitting students, to talking about the food we eat, to on and on and on, those sorts of things which have a real impact and make education happen not just in the classroom but outside.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 14

The egalitarian nature of the Maple community is something that remained constant since the opening of the college in the 1940s. A long-time faculty member describes this continuity of institutional values at Maple:

> I think that the things that are remaining constant through the college are a sense of collegiality and an emphasis on excellence in the classroom and out of it. There is an emphasis on moral responsibility on the campus, which is achieved through town meetings and through the community court. This is the only school I know where a student cannot be kicked out of the school except by a student, faculty, and staff panel. This is the only school I know that deliberately has the students outnumber the faculty and staff.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 5

The egalitarian nature of the community gives students a great deal of influence in their own learning as well as in the governance of the college. According to the senior academic affairs officer, Maple's continuation of the egalitarian community compels students to take their responsibilities seriously. She elaborated:

> The faculty teach, the students teach, and the administrators teach. Everybody teaches, and everybody participates in governance by virtue of their roles on committees. There also is teaching by role modeling. Trying to do what you are suppose to do, and giving the students an opportunity to fail and to succeed, to take personal responsibility for their education and their lives… I think that the students realize that it is a burden. To participate in these things is a burden, and nobody ever takes it lightly. As long as they continue to do that it will work. The second somebody says that really does not matter, or I do not really need to show up for that meeting, or I do not really need to bring to bear my full thoughts on this it will fail to work. But so far it works. Ultimately, I think it does help the students. We do have the same problems as everyone else [more hierarchical colleges] people feel disenfranchised, they feel like they did not get to participate, but the fact is the way that it is structured, they do get to participate and if not directly at least through the students they elected to the committee.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 3

In order to have an egalitarian community, learners must respect and support one another. Fostering learning necessitates a safe community where learners feel empowered to use "one's voice" through collectively questioning deeply held beliefs and past experiences (Ebert, Burford, & Brian, 2003). As one faculty member

explained, Maple has a history of providing a tolerant haven for members of socially stigmatized groups. She explained:

> Maple has always survived because of the niche audience, and it was the hippies in the 70s and now we have gotten a good rating in the gay guide to colleges, and you can tell from our website that we are not afraid of highlighting events like Queer homecoming or pictures of sexual diversity and that sort of thing. We also live in an area with an increasingly high transgendered population. Some of that is due to our [local] hospital, where people are going to get sex change operations onsite. This area is becoming a magnet for transgendered people. Acceptance is what makes Maple very different. Even the students here are like 'Wow have you noticed how many transgendered students we have here.' There is that difficulty with the he/she thing. Do I stay he or do I say she? Are you in transition? When will we know? It is one of those very sensitive and confusing things to talk about. And that is going to be a success, if we can maintain this acceptance and tolerance thing.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 2

Unconventional worldviews. Participants proudly describe Maple as refuge for faculty, students, and administrators who disagree with the prevailing social, economic, and educational values of society. Maple has a tradition of being a "countercultural" place made up of independent-minded people. One faculty member describes the challenges of being an outlier in American higher education. She noted:

> Maple has always been understood as a countercultural place. I notice that as the U.S. government begins to take more and more control over what constitutes a liberal arts education we find ourselves taking on a position of (well, it is almost like what they hit feminists with) stridency, because of that sense that nobody is listening to us. We are off doing something important and in some ways it has made us less able to explain ourselves to the greater world in the sense that we are becoming less and less attached to the way higher education in the United States is being configured. We have lost our ability to relate to other people because we describe our problems as unique to us. That sense that we are an outlier, that we are an entity to ourselves, and that either you get Maple or you do not get Maple. Our authority is always explained, because we are at Maple.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 2

Another faculty member describes the students who attended Maple as social outsiders who were looking for a place to fit in. He explained:

> The Maple student profile is one of the mavericks, maybe the misfits, maybe the iconoclasts, maybe the persons who are searching also. I think it is a mix of those types of people. There are a lot of different kinds of people at Maple, most fit the maverick-misfit sort of label, but are bright and curious. They would not come here if they were not. They are nonconformists to a large extent who come here because they need to be willing to take a chance on this community, because it is an organic human community. It is not an institutionalized setting that they can know going in what they are going to experience. And so, they tend to be risk takers in that sense, they tend to be flexible.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 21

The students at Maple are also unconventional in their motivations for seeking higher education. As one third-year student explained:

> I am not really here to get a degree. I just want to learn something, so that [the degree] is not the main point. A lot of people who are here are going on to graduate school just because they want to learn some more. I kind of like that because they are not after a job. Nobody really expects you to get a job. The focus is actually on learning, not on getting a job.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 8

Unconventional environment. A number of participants also discussed how being more isolated from American culture impacts the campus. The senior enrollment officer noted that the physical and cultural isolation necessitates a big adjustment for students who enjoyed a vast array of amenities in their hometowns, given that Maple students do not have convenient access to the eateries, clothing stores, or hangouts available in the typical college town. However, many of the students who enroll at Maple welcome the simplicity of the setting. He explained:

> It is very much off the beaten path, and we are about as isolated as it gets, look where we are. There is one paved road on campus, you know, we are sitting here in the mountains and when the sun goes down, it is going to be really

> dark. For students who come here, that can be an adjustment for some people because we are not the same as most other institutions. We do not have a student center with a food court -No Taco Bell. There is no traffic light here, there is no hotel, and there is not even an ATM. So, it is a very different kind of aesthetic and student experience. And some students are very attracted to this, because it is very different than anything they have known, and to them it is nirvana.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 18

One second-year student enjoys being removed from cultural distractions, such as cable television, but complains that students sometimes fail to stay informed about current events in the news. She noted:

> We are such an isolated community. We hardly have a news community, because we hardly ever hear news on campus. We do not have television, which I enjoy, but not all people read the newspaper. We are sort of out of touch. I mean there are televisions in dorms, like just for movies, but there is no cable. There is a satellite dish on our academic building; I think it is only used during election times, when they will broadcast the election coverage.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 17

In all, Maple's student, faculty, and administrators described deeply held institutional values that centered around four major themes. First, the self-directed program of study at Maple demands a high degree of independent work and student responsibility, which proves unusually demanding for most traditional college aged students. Second, through both their completion of the plan and the work in their small seminar classes, students engage in problem base learning. Faculty facilitate these projects, but students must ultimately develop their own problem statements and conduct the necessary research to address their research questions. Third, Maple curricula, and in particular the plan, supports an institutional commitment to experiential learning. Students cannot merely take courses, sit in the library, or search on the computer to find information about their project. Instead Maple's students

actually go out into the world in search of the answers they seek. Lastly, Maple offers students the opportunity to be a part of an open and supportive community of scholars. By creating close-knit relationships between students, faculty, and administrators, Maple has created a unique environment where people trust each other and treat each other as equals. Maple's strong sense of community allows for a remarkable degree of collaborative learning, as well as respect for diversity and independent thinking.

Perspectives on Organizational Change at Maple

Not a great deal has changed with regard to Maple's commitment to self-directed learning or egalitarian governance since the college first opened in the years after the Second World War. However, the characteristics of the students, faculty, and administrators at Maple seem to have changed over the years. Participant's comments revealed two themes of change at Maple: student culture and professionalization. Student culture describes the values and backgrounds of students attending Maple. I define professionalization as representing administrators or faculty who place greater emphasis on higher educational industry values, such as an emphasis on research as opposed to undergraduate teaching. For the professional-oriented faculty member loyalty to the discipline often supersedes loyalty to their institution, given that career advancement and security (for non-tenured faculty) rests more with publications than through service or teaching.

Theme One: Evolving Student Culture

In my interviews, participants expressed concern over what they see as changing characteristics in some of the students applying and enrolling at Maple.

They described a small but growing number of "mainstream" students, who they characterized as having a customer mentality (i.e., less altruistic and more self-entitled) and showing a preference for electronic as opposed to in-person communication.

Participants decried the presence of a growing minority of Maple's students with a consumer mentality. Recent recognition for a rigorous and successful undergraduate program may have garnered the attention of a more mainstream audience of potential students. A second year student noted the arrival of more consumer-oriented students at Maple:

> It seems like a different group of people are starting to apply to Maple. Where before it was almost, or it seemed that it was almost exclusively hippie types, or completely nonconformist people. It seems like a lot more conventional or mainstream students are coming to campus.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 17

One third-year student detailed the characteristics of the conventional type of student. According to her, mainstream students often hail from more educationally and economically privileged backgrounds, but they are not the creative mavericks that Maple typically attracts. A third-year student expressed her contempt for the more mainstream students at Maple:

> The student body always changes. Right now, it is changing in a certain direction that I do not really like. I find that the people that are applying here are more traditional people who get great SAT scores and excellent grades in high school. They have their standard extracurriculars and are more privileged. At least my impression of Maple, when I got here, was that the student body was more academically diverse. And now it seems over the past three years more and more people have been accepted that are just kind of dull, not really original thinkers. It is now more people who are kind of reserved, traditional academic types as compared with the kind of weird, crazy, hippies that are here. I think the balance has always been for live and let live.

-Maple College Interviewee 8

Furthermore, faculty and administrators noted an increase in self-entitlement among incoming Maple students, and highlighted how this trend ran counter to Maple's emphasis on service to the college as both a way to promote community and an important part of students' ethical development. The senior student enrollment officer described the growing resistance against contributing to the community among new students:

> I think that some of the differences about this place are that we ask students to clean the dining hall and we ask them to help maintain the campus. At other places there are only staff members who do that. But, there is a backlash from some of the students who say, I pay enough for this school, and I do not have to do that.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 19

A number of faculty members commented on the need to make sure that students who enroll at Maple understand their responsibility to actively support the campus community. One faculty member expressed concern about volunteerism on campus. He explained:

> There has been a bit of a shift from students who come here [and] want to contribute to the institution to students who come here and have more expectations of the institution. I think the one place you can see this is in campus Work Day that we have twice a year in the spring and fall. We have an afternoon and we try to get all the campus community members to participate in projects around campus. They can be gardening kinds of things; they can be painting projects, just all kinds of community projects. I think participation has really fallen off since I first got here. So, I think that the students are coming with less of a community building mindset and more of an attitude of 'I am paying a lot of money for college, what benefits are there for me?' That is a little part of it with service, but we still get students who come who want to contribute to the institution.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 4

Another change in the student culture at Maple is that more and more students prefer to communicate electronically as opposed to in person. This has implications for a community based on face-to-face interpersonal communication and close relationships. As the senior academic affairs officer noted:

> The thing I would count as changing is our students. The things that students are now bringing to the college are very different than the things that students used to bring to the college. When I got here in 1997, there were no cell phones, a simple straightforward dramatic change in the way that people can communicate with each other, and there also was not as much utilization of e-mail. We now have students who do not expect to talk to a faculty member they send an e-mail. For the faculty who have been here a while that is a big difference. The expectation is you sit in the dining hall, you need to have contact with students, you see the student, the student sits down and you share a meal. You talk about stuff and it all kind of works itself out. An e-mail is a very different relationship due to complications of responding to e-mail. It has no tone. When you were talking to a person you can express yourself using your hands and your voice intonation and all of this is a way of talking and communicating with students, but if you do it through the platform of e-mail or some other electronic device it changes the teaching relationship. So how students and professors relate has changed due to the rise in use of electronic media.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 3

Student participants mentioned an unsuccessful student-driven attempt to ban cell phones at a recent town hall meeting and believed technology may reduce the number of social interactions within the campus. An older student who came back to Maple after a four-year hiatus expressed astonishment at the increased use of technology to communicate with people both inside and outside of the college among Maple's students. She expressed concern that students might feel more isolated as the amount of personal interaction between members of the campus community becomes increasingly dominated by electronic communication. She explained:

> It is a generation shift and a lot of these kids are on their phones checking these blog things or whatever on the computer like instant messaging…That is how they spend a lot of their time connecting to others through technology. People do not write letters anymore. They write e-mails. And I think it is kind of a thing where people do not hang out much anymore. They just do their own thing. And you know, I am older, I am 25, and I am not really into the college scene much. I am really focused on my work. I do not have time to just hang out. So, it is not just them, if anything I am part of the problem. I do not try to get people together and get things done.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 13

Theme Two: Professionalization of Faculty and Administration

In response to the outside regulation, changes in the faculty labor market, and the need to compete strategically with other institutions. Maple has begun to employ professional college administrators, as well as faculty that tend to be more oriented toward research and their professions than solely to undergraduate teaching and the institution.

A long-time faculty member discusses why Maple has moved to a professional administration, and how that move has supported the institution's mission. He elaborated:

> We changed from a college in which the faculty did most of the administrative work to a college with more staff than faculty. One example is the amount of staff that it takes to relate to the outside world—you know the amount of public relations— we went from a very meager budget for publicizing the college to a major one, because we have to. We must compete with a certain kind of college (small, liberal arts colleges of a progressive bent) for students, faculty, [and] attention. So, we have to gear up our public relations machine and spend a lot of money to compete with these other schools for resources. And the students are going into debt to have everything their way. So they come to Maple and they want the personal attention. They want someone who is in their specialty. They want everything. And, of course, Maple cannot provide everything to everyone. In fact, the college has spent a lot of money on getting them here, so there is less money for the actual education. So, the tuition has gone up incredibly, but is the education any better? Who knows?

-Maple College Interviewee 12

In addition to evidence that Maple now has a more professionalized administration, participants also highlight a growing number of professionalized junior faculty. One junior faculty member described the differences between the older generation and the recently appointed faculty. She explained:

> When you have a founding generation—the older faculty here are not the founding generation but they have been here since the 1960s—they are also not as professionalized a generation of faculty, and that is not an insult but a fact. The earlier generation of faculty, perhaps did not finish their Ph.D., and did not attend professional conferences regularly. They did not have as many professional concerns and the insularity here perhaps justified that lack of participation in professional circles. That has created a big split, and I fear a good deal of hostility, and I fear that when the new faculty say that we actually want to examine this issue more critically, older faculty see that as an indication of their inadequacy. The spirit of dialogue just becomes defensive and brutal—I mean, not pretty. And faculty generational differences are not something that just occurs at Maple, but is happening in a lot of places. It is totally a different world. And for older faculty, they did not have that job stress. It was easier to get into graduate school, and it was easier to find a position. It was generally a fairly elite group of people. So everything has changed and that has really created an inability for everyone to understand each other.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 2

Maple faces organizational change as it hires professionalized faculty and administration, encounters changing student values, and responds to greater outside regulation. A faculty member who has been at Maple for around two decades discussed how the college became "a bit more bureaucratic." She noted:

> I think as an institution we have become a bit more bureaucratic. You know, there is everything from the government saying we have to fill out these forms and the accreditation bureau saying you have to use more assessment and evaluation tools. You know, it used to be much more basic. For example, the committee for world studies approves field trips, major field trip kinds of proposals. And in the olden days, and even much more so before I came, it

> was the 'Oh, I have a VW van. Let's get some students and faculty and a couple of tents and drive down to Mexico for Christmas or spring break and we will study the ecology and biology of that area or maybe go to some archaeological sites. Camp along the way and come back. Drive straight 40 hours down and 40 hours back.' And that was a field trip and they are sort of legends of the legendary decades in the 70s and the 80s and the early 90s when I got here. And now the people who did that are older or have left, retiring, or their life circumstances have changed. Also the reality of who wants to drive for 40 hours, or what about taking airplanes instead, which means more money. The passing of the kind of moral ability, legal responsibility, kinds of things have also changed. There is still some of that spirit here; it is just that the kinds of guidelines have changed and the energy bubbles have bust.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 14

Overall, participants primarily discussed the continuity of institutional values at Maple, but noted two important themes that described Maple's organizational change in recent years. One theme focused on the shifting attitudes and behaviors of the student population. Participants expressed concern that growing self-entitlement and use of communication technology among entering students has begun to undermine the distinctive close-knit campus community and shared governance at Maple. Another change that participants highlighted was the professionalization of faculty and staff. Maple has hired a professionalized administration to replace the traditional practice of faculty administering the college. A number of Maple's participants believe that their college must have a professionalized administration to compete with other liberal arts colleges for students, faculty, and attention. In addition, Maple's participants describe a new generation of faculty who are more concerned with doing research and activities in their discipline than in administering the non-academic aspects of their institutions.

Participant's Assessment of Challenges facing Maple

My interviews clearly indicated that students, faculty, and administrators cherish that Maple offers students a personalized educational experience within an intimate community, where students form close working relationships with faculty and peers. Despite the fact that Maple's isolated location has generally allowed it to remain unchanged, participants illuminated two organizational changes that could ultimately affect the social and academic landscape of the college (namely, a changing student population and the professionalization of faculty and administration). Maple's students, faculty, and administrators tended to describe these organizational changes as a response to external threats that challenge the institution's ability to attract faculty, maintain the educational quality of the academic program, and improve the financial position of the institution.

In discussing challenges to the institution, participants' concerns over monetary issues appeared intertwined with issues of community. The success of Maple's curricula rests on students' experience of challenge, support, and engagement. Offering a self-directed program of study in a supportive campus environment requires substantial financial and faculty resources, as well as a student body that possess the commitment and maturity to push themselves academically, while simultaneously contributing to the needs of the larger campus community.

Theme One: Sustaining a Student-oriented Faculty

The majority of the participants I interviewed addressed the challenges of faculty retention, retirements, and compensation. At Maple, the faculty-student connections are so cherished that the loss of any faculty member deeply concerns

students and disrupts the facilitation of self-directed learning. Students need consistent advisors with the expertise to guide the independent work in their topic of interest. The labor intensive nature of the Maple curriculum requires highly involved faculty who can work with students individually. The growing financial expense of funding a personalized education and attracting a professionalized faculty poses a serious challenge to the Maple's continued practice of liberal arts education. Furthermore, about half of the full-time faculty at Maple will be retiring in the next decade, which has added urgency to the recruitment of faculty that fit Maple's values.

> A number of retirements are going to happen in the next ten years. And so the people who really knew the old college will have retired and it will be a very different place. I picked up a catalog from fifteen years ago within the past month to look at who was here and who was gone, and we have gone through so many changes in terms of faculty and staff. So, it is kind of like nobody is left and everybody is going to leave. I think this is something that has been sort of recognized and put into place is this very orderly kind of retirement plan, and not necessarily a golden parachute or carrot, but something that would make the retirement orderly and doable in terms of hiring. But the finances, also I think put a strain on hiring and then getting people acculturated, and get them to do plan work and tutorials.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 14

The faculty participants approaching retirement believe in the educational system at Maple. They are not highly compensated but have been committed to Maple's community and curriculum ideals. As one faculty member who is close to retirement noted:

> People are sweetly trying to encourage those of us who love the place to stay here just a few years longer. A little pressure there, I may or may not listen to it. But the other thing is that there is a great effort being made to assimilate the new faculty to the place. And then there has been a gallant attempt to raise salaries and that is much more important in terms of the economy in the area because rent is about ten times what it was when I came here. The cost to buy a house is just exorbitant in this area.

-Maple College Interviewee 5

Faculty salaries impact the recruitment of new faculty as well as in the retention of faculty once they take a position at Maple. The average salary for a faculty member at Maple was $50,745 in fiscal year 2007. A new faculty member would expect to fall below the average. The small size of the student body and the college's dependence on tuition and fees makes it difficult to improve faculty salaries. However, the current president has raised $12 million to create an endowment fund for faculty compensation and retirement benefits. This is a significant amount of fund raising for Maple considering that the total endowment is below $50 million. A number of participants noted that faculty compensation and turn-over continue to be significant challenges.

As one faculty member appointed to the college decades ago pointed out, low compensation has always made it difficult for faculty to stay at Maple. She revealed how her commitment to Maple overcame her desire to secure a better standard of living, but she is not sure that the new generation of faculty would have the same level of institutional loyalty. She stated:

> At one point, I went out on the job market because I thought I could not live on what I was making and I was getting sick and tired of not being paid very much. But when I saw what I would be involved in—three people wanted to hire me—I decided not to take any of those three jobs and I came back here.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 5

Students also addressed faculty and staff compensation. One third-year student elaborated on the relationship between turn-over of new faculty and faculty salaries:

> Just because we cannot afford to pay anybody very much we have lost so many faculty, so many staff, and so many administrators. Sometimes you just do not

> have a choice. What they pay here is really ridiculously low. It is kind of depressing. And sometimes you just cannot work for that.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 8

In addition to retaining faculty, participants discussed the issue of increasing the size of the faculty to support the growth in the number of students, as the personalized model of education Maple offers is very labor intensive for faculty. The newly appointed senior student affairs officer highlighted the need to prevent faculty burnout, by increasing the number of faculty and staff positions. As he noted:

> We do not have enough faculty. There are a number of faculty who are just going to burnout. So, I think being able to consistently offer the ratio of faculty to students really requires us to grow the faculty. So, the staff needs to grow too and I think that includes the development office, which needs people to raise the funds to support it. I think that increasing staff and faculty is necessary to meet this growing number of students. And financially, we are not in a bad spot. There are attempts to add more faculty positions. I know they are working on some staff positions, but financially there is a difference between us being in a good place financially and us having the resources to add more positions. So, there is a lot of growing to do, people are requiring more resources than we have. But in order to offer what we currently say we offer, we will need more resources to add faculty and staff.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 19

Due to increased specialization in the faculty labor market and greater competition for the best faculty, Maple faces a challenge in finding the right candidates to aid their unique academic mission. As one long-time faculty member explained, Maple's dilemma involves finding faculty to represent their discipline in a more generalist fashion. He noted that having only one faculty in most disciplines has allowed Maple to provide a more broad-based education with limited faculty resources. He elaborated:

> We are competing with schools that have huge endowments, big reputations, and incredible infrastructure. And so, how do we compete? Well we are like

> the corner mom and pop store competing with the big supermarket or Wal-Mart. And what we do is, we stay open longer, we stretch ourselves to the limit, we try and provide personal attention, and so we make up for what we do not have in the customized service. You know, you want caviar from lower Slovenia, we cannot get it for you. Ultimately, it is a losing proposition because we can only stretch ourselves so thin. We often hire faculty who do not want to do that, they want to teach their specialties. You know, they are hired here to teach Spanish, they want to teach Spanish culture and Spanish literature. They do not want to teach things that they are not prepared to teach. But, Maple has made its reputation on faculty who stretched themselves, who had to become generalists, who dip into everything.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 12

The topic of recruiting and retaining faculty has historically been a sensitive issue, as many cannot understand why faculty would leave such a fulfilling campus community. Until recently, few were willing to accept that institutional factors played a role in the increasing faculty attrition rate. However, community members are beginning to address the issue. As one faculty member commented:

> We have made a lot of new hires, and people are not really sticking around, and that is not good. Then we do searches, and they fail, and if somebody brings it to the administration's notice, we are accused of being unfaithful. So that is really problematic, and there needs to be a willingness to self-reflect. We need to think about, 'What do we need to do here so that people will come and stay?' And that was not happening, and that was pretty depressing. Now there has been a lot of increased effort and interest in exchanging knowledge with other colleges. This is something that [the president and senior academic affairs officer] are taking seriously. They are trying to form other horizontal connections with other colleges and that has been really helpful. In terms of self-evaluation and trying to figure out why we are having trouble with getting faculty to stay.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 2

Theme Two: Communicating a Liberal Arts Educational Identity

Participants at Maple realize that the college must no longer isolate itself from the rest of academia. Maple's faculty and administration underscored the need to extinguish the insularity of their campus culture toward like-minded institutions in

order to enhance their practices of liberal arts education. The faculty participants discussed collaborations with other liberal arts colleges as a means to strengthen Maple's position in higher education.

Given the dwindling number of institutions that practice liberal arts education (Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997; Neely, 1999), liberal arts colleges must work together to demonstrate the value of this form of education in the twenty-first century. One faculty member discussed the need for institutions like Maple to engage in a "progressive education movement." She explained:

> We need to be more thoughtful about what I would say is a progressive educational movement. We think we do things on our own terms here at Maple. But in actuality, we do not—we do things in opposition to other things. Our criticism is always externally generated, and we have a very hard time internally criticizing ourselves…We engaged in fabulous pedagogical practices here. We need to talk eloquently about what we are doing and understand how it can be used by other institutions that are making similar efforts so as to create more solidarity. Liberal arts colleges need to learn from each other and start to understand some of these challenges, because it is something that is affecting us all, and that we are not all unique in our suffering. We need to become more articulate about another way to do education than one that is highly rationalized.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 2

A long-time faculty member discussed how her engagement with academia has helped student learning. She noted that the insularity of Maple is a challenge. She elaborated:

> One of the dangers of teaching here is that you become too insular, and I have made it my deliberate business to give conference papers and to make connections with people outside the institution. Now, I confess that I do that for the students. Because, when I hire an outside examiner, I want someone who will be good and critique my teaching—as well as the student—and write a recommendation for the student, because we are not well-known. And I am not well-known, because I do not publish, but I am well-known in that little circle of professional colleagues that I have cultivated over the years.

-Maple College Interviewee 5

Collaboration with liberal arts institutions is perhaps a response to the need to redefine liberal arts education for the twenty-first century. In an age of increasingly pre-professional education on college campuses, the value of a liberal arts education is not always well articulated by liberal arts colleges. Thus, the public may question the relevance of educational environments like the curricula at Maple. Participants noted the changing demographic trends call for a redefinition of Maple College's identity in a way that holds to the boundaries of liberal arts education.

The senior student enrollment officer discusses how the college is forming a recruitment strategy to address declining populations in Maple's traditional areas of student recruitment. He discusses how projected enrollment trends in higher education threaten Maple's ability to recruit students. He noted:

> The colleges most at risk in the future will be small, private liberal arts colleges located in a rural part of the Northeast that are somewhat expensive and that have a limited endowment. It is kind of like check, check, check, check; we meet every one of those criteria. So we are definitely a school that is characterized in emerging research as at risk in the demographic shift. One of the challenges for us going forward is that almost all of our traditional feeder states are declining, demographically. And the rapid growing states, like Arizona and Utah, Florida, and Nevada are places that we do not traditionally get very many students from. So we know that we are never going to replace students from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York with students say from Arizona and Nevada because in sheer volume of numbers, students do not typically go that far away to school for undergraduate studies. So we are still strategizing as far as how to position the college.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 18

In addition to the demographic shifts threatening the recruitment base, Maple offers a type of education that society views as less immediately transferable to a

career. The senior student enrollment officer noted that for a growing demographic the "return on investment" influences the college selection process. He explained:

> Around 70% of our students go on to graduate school. So the outcomes from doing a plan of concentration in areas that we offer are not going to be as immediate as say if I was a marketing major at Fordham, or if I was studying physical therapy at SUNY Downstate Medical Center. I might be looking for a position immediately upon graduation, whereas, Maple students are a little more entrepreneurial than that. They are looking at preparation for lifelong learning, they are going to graduate school, or they are looking at doing something internationally. It is a different kind of longer-term mindset than someone who is seeking an immediate outcome. And I think that is a good thing, but it is also a challenge at the front end because people (it is mostly families) are looking for a return on investment… They want to know that there is going to be a job waiting for me. Maple does not even have an office of career planning and placement services for example.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 18

The economic struggles of historically disadvantaged groups makes for a growing demographic of students concerned about careers and economic security (Haycock, 2006). In order overcome future enrollment challenges, Maple must show the value of their unique educational experience. Participants believed that in order to meet this challenge, Maple must reestablish the identity of the institution, while preserving the college's learner-centered values. A second year student made the following comment:

> One of the biggest challenges Maple is going to have is holding on to its identity while moving with the big, growing, technological world because we have a certain nostalgic history. This school was built on the G.I. Bill, it used to be a farm. We have these ideas of what Maple was and it is changing, as technology grows and as people's lives are changing. So, I think preserving some of what was here to begin with, while things are changing is a challenge.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 17

A long-time faculty member reflected upon the learner-focused model of education at Maple and the challenges that it faces in re-positioning itself as it becomes more "bureaucratized." He noted:

> At a certain point, we have to keep our enrollment down. We have to somehow find a way not to become 500 students, keep our faculty, and raise enough money to be able to sustain the labor intensive relationship of the tutorial system. This model of education of stretching minds and the interdisciplinary quality has almost an amateurish traditional notion of educators teaching life, not just a specific field. Using everything we have to create well-rounded intellectuals rather than narrow pre-professionals. That is our challenge and, if we do not meet that challenge we…will become more professionalized, and more like other liberal arts colleges because we will have to get more and more students in order to survive. There will be less personal attention, more infrastructure, and the model of education that we have been pursuing for the last 60 years will eventually become a new model of education, which might be fine, but it will not be Maple. Our challenge, or our issue, is how much as we change—as we become more bureaucratized—are we going to be able to sustain and to preserve what got us to where we are now. What enabled us to make the reputation we have, what got us into *Colleges that Change Lives*, and 'best faculty' in the *Princeton Review* and *More Bang for the Buck*. And, what got us to that was the mom and pop corner store model. And I think we are not so slowly moving in a different direction. The issue is whether as we move toward a more traditional liberal arts college can we keep something of what we formulated in the past.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 12

Another faculty member believed that financial resources would ultimately decide how long Maple can support liberal arts education and the traditional educational values of the institution, such as self-directed learning. He explained:

> When you are working independently and when you are pursuing an independent vision, the challenge is going to be money. In the world in which we live, there is increasingly less attention for undergraduate liberal arts education. It is all about specialization and professional development: Law, medicine and, banking. I met a guy on a safari in Africa, an American, and I asked, did you just graduate; and he said I just graduated from college. And I asked, what did you major in and he said real estate. Real estate as a major! From the point of a liberal arts college, I did not understand. To a certain extent, Maple's mode of education is rooted in a time and place that valued

> intimate student-centered learning and discourse, small classes and close relationship with faculty. Now the question is if it is going to remain cost effective and can it remain viable. Will this notion of student-centered learning sort of go out of vogue? Has it already? I do not know. It is a big country. We only need 300 kids, and our country has 300 million.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 21

Finding that one student in a million is important. Maple has to continue to demonstrate effectiveness at transforming the average student into an academically successful graduate. Staying honest to the definition of liberal arts education is important to the kinds of learning outcomes that Maple seeks for its students. The senior academic affairs officer believes that Maple must determine the flexibility of liberal arts education in reconciling the needs of new students with a set of curricular traditions. She elaborated:

> Students' needs are different— the students have expectations of what a liberal arts education is for and whether or not they are going to get a job. For institutions the developing problems of the market place of staying alive and staying in business seem to run up against this question of an established definition of liberal arts and what that means. Because it means something; it comes out of a European tradition, and the things that you are supposed to know with a liberal arts education are known things. It is not like how do we make the chocolate bar tastier for the new taste of students, it is that the chocolate bar has to have a particular kind of taste, and we need to get the students to like that taste rather than the other way around. The major challenge is figuring out how flexible the liberal arts curriculum can be and stay honest to what exactly it is, in a time when the students are being differently educated in high schools and in elementary schools and by their parents, because they are totally different traditions learning. We are getting totally different types of students in what their skill levels are. The whole concept of a learner used to be that a teacher would stay in the classroom and if students did not get the knowledge it was their problem. Now we know that, there are all these different learning styles. We need to modify how we teach and what we teach in order to ensure that we get through to students. So at the same time you are doing that, you have content and you cannot give up on any particular content, because the amount of content has to stay to the same. But you have to modify instruction to get the skills and capacity in order to transfer

> the content to the students. So there are a lot of challenges in perpetuating a liberal arts curriculum.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 3

Maple's success relies on the institution's ability to provide motivated students with a uniquely personalized education, based in the liberal arts education tradition, as well as a supportive campus community and faculty who are deeply committed to helping students reach their intellectual potential. Given greater competition between colleges for students and faculty, a projected decline in Maple's traditional applicant population, and changes in what students expect from their institution of higher education, Maple must learn to communicate the unique merits of their educational experience to a larger audience.

Theme Three: Maintaining a Community Mindset

On this scenic campus, miles away from any town or city, fewer than 500 people live, learn, and participate in the governance of a college. For the participants, close knit relationships and participatory democracy served as perhaps the most essential ingredients in creating Maple's community of scholars, and thus, many interviewees stressed the significance of sustaining this exceptional sense of community.

The recently appointed senior student affairs officer believed that the self-directed nature of the Maple curriculum may contribute to feelings of disconnection and isolation among students. He was particularly concerned about students working on their independent plan projects. Plan students in the final year may not even be

enrolled in traditional courses, which in his opinion limit their opportunities to retain connections to Maple's faculty and students. He noted:

> Students could do a better job of connecting, because there is so much plan anxiety, and then there is the loneliness of being out on plan. One could argue that this pretty much is graduate school. They are doing graduate level work from the beginning…Students need more support to keep them connected. We do not do enough to connect different students who are studying parallel things that do intersect in different ways. And so, there is a little too much of a sense that a student is out there doing their own individual work because it is set up that way, and students can only do so much as individuals. We really need to find a better way of fostering a cohort model.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 19

Participants view the consumer-mentality as a threat to their community, given that a growing number of students believe their tuition entitles them to demand special treatment from the college. However, Maple has high expectations that students must serve the college. They are expected to take responsibility for making the campus a better place. Students serve the college by keeping their own residence halls clean, volunteering to work in the dining hall, and participating in campus governance. According to some participants, a number of students are more interested in themselves and do not believe that they should have to serve the campus. One faculty member believes that students at Maple have to want to volunteer their time to improve the college. He explained:

> I think our challenge is to maintain that ideal of having a community that wants to contribute something to the college. If you do not like the way something works, or the way something looks, instead of saying 'someone in our administration should do something about it', community members should say 'I am going to do something about that.' For example, getting together with some other students to offer a solution to a problem; We try and have a community that is going to take responsibility for life on campus—as opposed to expecting someone else to do it for you—a lot of people in the community can act as examples of how to do that. One thing we can do is to try to get

> faculty members to model for the students how we do that and how a community runs. Also, how we market ourselves and present ourselves to the outside world is also important, so students coming here have an idea of what we expect from them. That way when they get here, they do not have some misconception of what life here is like.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 4

One third-year student argued that the town hall meeting serves as the glue that connects together everyone at Maple. She noted:

> One of the biggest challenges for the future is continuing town meeting because that is one of the most important characteristics of the college. It is where we get together and make a lot of decisions about issues that affect everybody. It is a public forum that really builds community. It brings everybody together, and we can discuss things that are important to us. It is comforting to have that still be here. It makes us feel like we have community. I think as long as we still have that feeling of community, we will still have the strong tie to each other, and we know that it is tough to be here sometimes and that we are all here together. We understand that community is a huge part of Maple, and if it still continues to function as a community we will be fine.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 1

Almost all the participants I spoke to talked about the significance of the Maple community and expressed the importance of sustaining it. According to one second year student, anxiety about maintaining the community ideals of Maple College has been a recurring concern. She noted:

> People have this tendency to think that our community has dissolved. Like community is something we talk about nonstop, our capital 'C' community. So everyone is very concerned that lately, in the past couple of years, that as a community we are not as tight as the Maple community used to be. And I was looking at a *Citizen* [Maple College's newspaper] article, from 1976 … was titled 'Does Community Matter at Maple?' Like these same things are being talked about for years and years.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 17

In sum, Maple's major challenges fit into three major themes. First, Maple must confront the financial demands of funding a personalized academic program by

securing faculty resources. Maple must attract new faculty with an interest in representing whole disciplines as opposed to narrow specializations within a discipline. The recruitment of new faculty requires greater attention to compensation and the professionalized focus of the new generation of scholars. Second, Maple will need to define the merits of a countercultural liberal arts education to a changing student demographic that may not immediately recognize the inherent value of a liberal arts education. Lastly, Maple must ensure their most cherished institutional value—their strong sense of community—remains robust in providing support and inspiration for all community members.

Addressing Institutional Challenges

Participants discussed a number of Maple initiatives to address particular challenges to the college. As mentioned earlier, the president raised $12 million for an endowment to improve faculty compensation. Other developments include less resistance to organizational self-refection and more collaboration with other liberal arts colleges to improve the practice of liberal arts education.

The desire to collaborate with other liberal arts colleges now holds widespread support at Maple. Maple appears more interested in working with other liberal arts institutions to enhance their practice of liberal arts education, which is significant for a campus that views itself as an "outlier" in higher education. Collaboration with other liberal arts colleges allows institutions to help communicate the importance of a liberal arts education to the public and helps institutions to enhance their educational practices through sharing of information. One faculty member discusses how she has

been involved with a consortium of institutions that focuses on innovations in liberal arts education. According to her, consortia represent a tactic that Maple is using to redefine and communicate its ability to better educate the students of tomorrow. She explained:

> I was just thinking about consortiums. The Consortium for Innovative Environments in Learning (CIEL) includes Berea (KY), a place in Arizona, Evergreen State College (WA). These are colleges that want to get together and do workshops together, engage in pedagogical workshops together and examine what we are doing in the classroom. We [are] talking about things that promote more project-centered learning or problem-driven learning, which creates more engaged learners than a highly rationalized testing-based top-down system of education.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 2

Despite a number of challenges, participants generally felt that Maple College was currently in a healthy financial position. One cautiously optimistic faculty member noted as he noted:

> Maple has many healthy signs, it is not a college that is flagging, or bailing out, or throwing stuff overboard. It has a lot going for it, but money will be the big issue. I think there will always be leadership issues, but it currently has good leadership and the staff and faculty are strong and committed and very gifted. Also, if you look at how long staff people stay around here, they stay a long time.
>
> -Maple College Interviewee 21

Summary of Results from Maple College

Maple opened after the Second World War to reform undergraduate education. The institution's philosophy seeks to provide liberal arts education in a more egalitarian and democratically-based environment. Maple's students have thrived under this institutional environment due to curricular structures that encourage them to pursue their own intellectual questions with the support and guidance of close faculty

relationships. Outside of the curricula, Maple pulls together a student body that intrinsically values learning in a way that promotes intellectual discussions, student collaboration, and active experimentation. The responsibility that Maple affords traditional students is not confined solely to academics, but includes their important role in governance and the maintenance of campus buildings and grounds. Maple's students, faculty, and administration hold a shared commitment to liberal arts education with self-directed curricula, an emphasis on problem-based learning, and an appreciation for experience as a developmental tool. Participants also stressed the importance of the egalitarian and supportive nature of the Maple campus community to student development and institutional prosperity.

Participants voiced concerns that the changing attitudes of Maple's new faculty and students might undermine Maple's egalitarian and supportive environment. According to participants, the shifting student culture increasingly prefers electronic communication to in-person communication and the rise of a consumer-minded mentality makes the students more demanding of services and represents a departure from the countercultural students that traditionally enroll and volunteer to support Maple. Perhaps the most significant change at Maple, however, was the shift in the administration of the college from faculty to professional administrators. Maple's faculty describe the change to a professional administration as an appropriate response for the college to better compete with similar liberal arts colleges for students, faculty, and resources.

Maple continues to face a number of challenges. First, sustaining a personalized academic program necessitates a focus on attracting and maintaining a dedicated faculty. Due to the greater specialization in the faculty labor market, countercultural liberal arts colleges must raise more resources to attract the small supply of candidates interested in becoming generalists for their respective disciplines. Maple's president has made it an institutional priority to raise money for enhancement of faculty salaries and benefits.

Maple must also engage in greater efforts to communicate the benefits of their educational experience to a wider audience of potential supporters (i.e., potential students, faculty, donors, parents, etc.). Although, Maple recently succeeded in attracting a record number of students, Maple's current students, faculty, and administration appear increasingly concerned about a growing minority of entering students who seem more self-entitled and, in turn, less supportive of Maple's community ideals. Lastly, Maple, must not compromise their unique community atmosphere, which offers students unparalleled personalized support and opportunities to grow outside the classroom. The case of Maple demonstrates how an egalitarian and democratic community of scholars produces exceptional educational outcomes, and Maple's distinctive style of governance ensures that students, faculty, and administrators will share in addressing any challenges that threaten their shared institutional values.

CHAPTER SIX: INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The current study explores the impact of societal shifts in commercialism and consumerism on lesser-known colleges with a tradition of liberal arts education. In a system that values, recognizes, and rewards only those colleges and universities that possess wealth, fame, and exclusivity (Carey, 2006; Ehrenberg, 2002; Haycock, 2006; Myers, 2007), pressures to obtain these desirable yet elusive characteristics will inevitably lead to a reduction in the diversity of organizational and educational practices in American higher education (ACSFA, 2006; Callan, 2006; Delucci, 1997; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, Nelson, 2007; Scott, 2001). The distinctive mission of a liberal arts education—which aims to nurture the students' intrinsic interest in personal liberation, creative fulfillment, and self-actualization (Churchill, 2002; Diver, 2007)—stands in stark contrast to the current societal emphasis on attainment of wealth and prestige. Thus, many countercultural liberal arts colleges stand at a crossroads between revenue generation and dedication to their academic tradition (Alfred, 2006; Gomes, 1999; Graubard, 1999; Van Der Wef, 1999a, 1999b).

In the current work, I have attempted to give voice to the internal stakeholders at countercultural liberal arts colleges. In their interviews, participants interpreted their institution's strengths and weaknesses in the face of threats to their institution's vitality, and reflected upon their college's practice of liberal arts education. As expected, educational, social, economic, and cultural trends surfaced as a source of concern and debate at the case institutions. As the results of the current work suggest,

these colleges continually explore ways to reconcile the needs of society in the twenty-first century with their unconventional educational structures and values.

In this chapter, I respond to each of my research questions by integrating the results from Apple and Maple colleges. As I integrate the findings, I attempt to connect the research literature on liberal arts education and organizational change to my findings from Apple and Maple colleges, and present my response to the primary research questions.

Research Question 1: What ideals do faculty, administrators, and students at countercultural liberal arts colleges hold for their institutions?

Apple and Maple emphasize an extremely high degree of learner responsibility and self-directed learning, which makes them institutional outliers in higher education, and perhaps even among liberal arts colleges. Despite their uniqueness, Apple and Maple are similar to more elite liberal arts schools in fulfilling the necessary criteria—put forth by Blaich and colleagues (2004)—for a liberal arts education (namely, an intellectual philosophy that emphasizes broad-based learning over specialization in professional or vocational skills, a curriculum that supports student responsibility and intellectual development, and an environment of collaborative learning through learner relationships with other students and faculty).

In line with Blaich and colleagues' (2004) first criterion, an overwhelming number of student participants at Apple and Maple discussed the role of the college in refining their intellectual capacities to think critically, reflect, and communicate. Contrary to the consumer-driven model of higher education that seeks to market

education as a means to a better-paying job (Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Saunders, 2007; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), the students at countercultural liberal arts colleges appear to be a self-selecting group who value learning over the pursuit of a specific career. A greater number of students attend college in an effort to secure a high-paying job, rather than to attain personal growth—a dramatic reversal from forty years ago (Astin, 1993; 1998). However, the record enrollments at both colleges, suggest that a small, but reliable population of high school graduates continue to view the purpose of a college education differently than the typical high school graduate. Thus, countercultural liberal arts colleges find their focus on "habits of mind" at odds with the generally career-focused society and the increasing level of specialization occurring across higher education (Alfred, 2006; Graubard, 1999). The participants of the current work believe that a broad based liberal arts education prepares students not only for work, but for life-long learning. They note that the knowledge of a vocationally-based education may quickly become obsolete unless the learners have the skills to learn new information. Scholarship supports participant claims that liberal arts education provides the intellectual flexibility to better adapt to rapidly changing information needs of work and life (Churchill, 2002; Hersh, 1999; Pope, 2006; Sorum, 1999).

In order to succeed at countercultural liberal arts colleges, such as Apple or Maple, learners must possess a passion for learning and the ability to take responsibility for their own education. The curriculum is structured in a way that offers more flexibility than most liberal arts colleges, but the added freedom of a self-

directed learning model necessitates a higher level of learner responsibility and commitment to self-reflection (Knowles, 1980). Indeed, most traditional age college students are not developmentally prepared for the responsibilities associated with structuring their own curriculum (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Chickering & Reissier, 1993; Gardner, Upcraft, & Barefoot, 2004). As a consequence, both colleges have had to grapple with how to retain students, who—initially—may find it difficult to cope with the rigorous demands of their independent program of study.

As noted earlier, countercultural liberal arts colleges appeal to a small, self-selected group of high school graduates who find the self-directed curriculum appealing. Students seek out countercultural liberal arts colleges because they value academic environments that require them to be self-motivated and allow them control over their learning (e.g., through self-designed curricula and long-term independent research projects). A number of participants described Apple and Maple as "graduate school for undergraduates" because of the responsibility that students have for orchestrating their own learning experience. Furthermore, students have to produce high levels of independent work in their final projects, just as graduate students must complete a thesis or dissertation outside of their coursework. However, graduate programs do not typically provide the interdisciplinary approach commonly taken at Maple and Apple.

A number of students who choose Apple and Maple underestimate the commitment and responsibility necessary for success in a self-directed curriculum and some end up transferring to institutions with more conventionally structured curricula.

In a conventional curriculum, students declare a major that prescribes a pre-organized set of courses and requirements. Furthermore, students at more conventional colleges rarely produce an extensive body of scholarship that integrates their program of study, as the students need only perform satisfactorily in their prescribed major coursework to earn a degree. At more traditional institutions, the student's degree completion is judged exclusively by their performance in the classroom, yet research suggests social and intellectual engagement outside the classroom lead to greater social and academic success (Astin, 1993; Kuh, et al., 1991).

In contrast to more traditional curricula, countercultural liberal arts colleges expect higher levels of engagement in college governance and greater student responsibility for creating learning experiences outside the classroom. Although such rigorous standards for academic and social-interaction may not work for all institutions, many at Apple and Maple believed these expectations foster a challenging and supportive environment that contributed most to the superior learning outcomes of their students.

The research literature suggests that highly structured learning environments may be more developmentally appropriate for young adults who have limited prior knowledge or life experience (Knowles, 1980; Knowles & Associates, 1984; Kolb, 1984). However, greater institutional structure yields a more delineated hierarchy (i.e. more authoritarian treatment of students by faculty or administrators) and teacher-centered—as opposed to student-centered—learning (Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Saunders, 2007). Thus, for students who possess the necessary motivation and

maturity, the self-directed learning environments at these colleges are ideal for student development. For students who lack the necessary skills and preparation, institutional peer groups may help them succeed in a self-directed learning environment, as long as they have motivation to learn. Students who lack the necessary motivation may regain their intellectual curiosity through the supportiveness of the campus environment and the personal attention that they receive. For those who lack the maturity, students may need to spend time at a more structured educational institution or in the working world, before they can fully appreciate the flexibility of the educational curricula at these two colleges.

At countercultural liberal arts colleges, students exercise their voice through collaborative learning relationships with faculty and other students. Students, faculty, and administrators are on a first name basis, and such egalitarian learning environments are ideal for self-directed learners (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), as those environments reduce organizational barriers between their stakeholders and build a sense of shared responsibility for the community (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 2000).

Astin (1993) notes that the greatest contributing factor to student persistence in college is the amount of interaction students have with faculty members. Prior research suggests that students and faculty at countercultural liberal arts colleges engage in frequent intellectual discussions outside the classroom during social gatherings in places such as, residence halls, the cafeteria, the campus grounds, or when even on occasion at the private homes of faculty (Pope, 1996, 2000, 2006). My

interviews at Apple and Maple confirmed this important aspect of the academic culture at countercultural colleges, as both institutions evidenced high levels of faculty-student interactions, both inside and outside the classroom. Ultimately, those interactions allow for collaborative learning, faculty mentoring of students, and the socialization of students into the faculty culture, which all contribute to the students' academic growth (Breneman, 1994; Riesman, 1998). The bonds between students and faculty may help explain why the majority of graduates at Apple and Maple go on to graduate school, and many of the graduates pursue academic careers.

Faculty noted the merits of discussion-based learning in small seminar classes, as well as self-directed learning in the development of relationships between students and faculty. They asserted that students need the personal commitment and guidance of faculty to offer suggestions and encourage them as they pursue their own challenging academic questions. In line with this, Apple and Maple offer a model of education that requires a small student faculty ratio and a dependence on full-time faculty for the vast majority of instruction. Thus, the curricula at Apple and Maple are extremely labor-intensive for both faculty and students.

Apple and Maple provide an example of an institution where faculty have managed to address both curricular depth and breadth. The case institutions take an alternative approach to curricular breadth and depth through an interdisciplinary focus on the students' intellectual interests. Students must learn to take an approach to their in-depth projects that demonstrate an integration of different disciplinary perspectives and methodologies. Apple and Maple's students achieve curricular depth through the

specific research questions of their independent projects. However, students must study broadly to properly apply the intricacies of multiple disciplines to their independent projects. Thus, both institutions stress interdisciplinary approaches to learning so that students pursue their academic interests in depth while also getting a broad liberal arts education.

Another area that distinguishes Apple and Maple from most institutions concerns the roles that students play in campus governance. The hefty responsibility students have for campus decisions builds their leadership skills and also their loyalty for the institution. Students at Maple probably have the greatest role in shared governance, given that students have a vote equal to faculty and administrators at town hall meetings, and the students vote in committees on faculty hiring, faculty review, and student discipline. In addition, students are allowed to use the library, dining hall, or any other academic building at any hour of the day or night. The role that students have in shared governance teaches democratic values and prepares them to be active citizens in society. The responsibilities that Apple and Maple's students have for their college's well-being translate into their duties as citizens who support a just and sustainable world as these students learn the complexities of caring for a community made up of people who depend on it for an education, a social support next work, or an economic lively hood.

As equal stewards of their institutions with faculty and administrators, Apple and Maple's students have a greater opportunity to engage in experiences that promote affective development outside of the classroom. Liberal arts education values a whole

person approach to education that aims to develop broad intellectual knowledge while also deepening a student's philosophy of life. Furthermore, the whole person approach to education not only concerns the intellectual capacities, such as critical thinking, writing, and speaking, but addresses the health of the physical and psychological person as well. Perhaps the smaller scale of the countercultural liberal arts college allows for greater student involvement in governance.

Apple and Maple's students have a long tradition of participating in shared governance because the faculty and administration remain convinced that students benefit from the leadership experience. For example, Maple's administrators, faculty and students believe sitting on committees that decide the fate of community members (e.g. faculty promotion and student discipline) serve as both the most rewarding and most burdensome leadership opportunities. In addition, Apple and Maple's faculty and administrators find it easier to remain student-centered as they develop closer working relationships with their students who take on leadership roles. The opportunities for shared governance at these institutions give their students real decision-making experience the most traditional college students only experience after they enter their first professional position.

Taken together, the current work suggests that Apple and Maple fit Blaich and colleagues' (2004) three factor theory of the conditions necessary to have a truly liberal arts education. Even more than other liberal arts colleges, these countercultural liberal arts colleges hold strong expectations for learner responsibility and dedication to lifelong learning. Although these colleges provide a special milieu for the

intellectual and personal development of the most motivated and devoted students, self-directed learning may not be developmentally appropriate for all traditional college-aged students, especially those in the first 2 years of college (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Chickering & Reissier, 1993; Gardner et al., 2004). Although self-directed curricula are highly cherished at Apple and Maple, most students find it personally demanding and large percentages (around 30% to 45%) of students do not persist to graduation. Similar to other liberal arts colleges, Apple and Maple both promote the ideal of "learning for its own sake" (Breneman, 1994; Stimpert, 2004), yet both colleges differ from elite liberal arts colleges in their egalitarian approach to learning and campus-governance. At both colleges, the focus on collaborative—as opposed to competitive—learning makes the educational experience quite distinct from other types of institutions (even elite liberal arts colleges) and these qualities serve as hallmarks of the institutions' educational success.

Research Question 2: How do internal stakeholders identify and perceive organizational change?

Apple College and Maple College both have a history of critiquing conventional practices in undergraduate education. The two colleges hold strong liberal arts education values, which have remained relatively stable—in theory and practice—even as most of higher education has adopted a more competitive and consumer-driven mentality. Consequently, these institutions have always defended their own educational practices through opposition to perceived deficiencies in American undergraduate education. A focus on external criticism has made it difficult

for these unconventional liberal arts colleges to reflect and critique their own organizational practices. Thus, until recently the need for organizational change has not been well established, despite the fact that these institutions have had to struggle with financial difficulties and other challenges to their continued survival.

Both institutions have the potential to examine their own practices and engage in incremental or episodic changes (Quinn & Weick, 1999). Currently, Apple and Maple are in the process of self-evaluation, and there is growing recognition that some modification of organizational practices may be necessary for the future success of the college. Lewin (1951) notes that, before organizational change can occur, stakeholders must believe that current practices are no longer effective for organizational success. Perhaps what differentiates the case institutions from Lewin's theory of organizational change are that those institutions are not responding to organizational failures. Apple and Maple both have stronger financial positions than they did a decade ago (e.g., record enrollments, larger endowments). Therefore, the impetuses for organizational change at these two institutions are not failures, but rather the realization they must anticipate future challenges and develop innovative ways to address them (Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 1999).

Clearly, both institutions have begun efforts to engage in a reflective process of assessment and planning. For example, the president of Apple wrote *Apple Directional Document 1* (2006) and distributed ADD1 to organizational stakeholders. ADD1 attempted to create a framework for applying the college's deeply held educational values in the twenty-first century. More recently, *Apple Directional Document 2*

(2007) attempted to demonstrate the process by which the members of the college community could reflect upon and innovate the organization while retaining their deeply shared educational ideals. The president's attempt to lay out a vision and address the future challenges to the educational ideals at Apple indicates an attempt to encourage creative thinking throughout the organization. Generative learning in a learning organization requires creative tension between where the college currently is and where it aspires to be in the future (Fritz, 1990). Clearly, this institutional initiative has effectively motivated a wellspring of community engagement among administrators, students, and faculty to examine more deeply the practices and values of the organization.

A shared vision for change serves as the best vehicle for enhancing institutional practices and addressing future demands (Shinn, 2004). Liberal arts colleges appear well suited for the development of a shared vision, given that their students, faculty, and administrators often have a strong commitment to liberal arts education (Meyerson & Johnson, 1993). At Apple and Maple, the stakeholders appear to trust each other and generally want to work together to promote deeply-shared organizational ideals. The tradition of collaborative exploration and shared governance should make countercultural liberal arts colleges more likely than other institutions to enact incremental changes, as opposed to episodic changes. Ultimately, community ownership of college-wide initiatives should prove fruitful in the long run, despite the immediate debates and difficulties it might create over the short-term (Rowley & Sherman, 2001).

The tradition of shared governance at Apple and Maple creates an environment particularly conducive to the learning organization model. In the learning organizational model, all members of the institution have the opportunity to anticipate the future needs of the organization as well as to engage in innovation and improvisation of institutional practices (Meyerson & Johnson, 1993; Senge, 1990; Shinn, 2004). At Maple, in particular, there exists a community-wide forum for discussing issues facing the college. The town hall meetings provide an opportunity for the college's internal stakeholders to discuss innovations that support their community oriented atmosphere and in turn the future success of the organization. In the town hall meeting, students, faculty, and administrators debate innovations in non-curricular policies and vote on various proposals. The town hall meeting format treats all members of the community as equals, as all members can share their point of view and vote on the matters at hand. Few colleges and universities hold campus-wide meetings on a regular basis, which demonstrates the Maple commitment to shared-governance. At most institutions of higher education, the organizational structure is too large to give everyone a voice. In general, the institutional culture of countercultural liberal arts colleges provides a personal and egalitarian atmosphere where stakeholders feel a duty to voice their concerns and volunteer for activities that improve their college. At most institutions, campus-wide meetings would only be held for special events or in the event of an institutional crisis where getting the full participation of the stakeholders would still produce a challenge.

Change has been mostly incremental at Apple and Maple, which made it difficult for participants to point to any specific moment when the organization underwent a major change. One exception is the restructuring of the first-year curriculum at Apple in 2001. Apple changed from requiring students to complete five independent projects—one in each of the interdisciplinary schools—to requiring eight elective courses. Although this major curricular shift constituted a dramatic change for the educational environment for students and faculty, this change did not happen overnight. Rather, it occurred after a decade-long debate as to whether enough first-year students were succeeding as self-directed learners in their Division One projects. Even five years after the implementation of the new set of curricula, the campus still debates the merits of the change, suggesting that the institution is not in a "refreezing" stage (Lewin, 1951) with regard to the first-year curriculum. In fact, students have organized a mentoring program for first-year students who still want the opportunity to engage in their own independent projects. The values of self-directed learning and learner responsibility are deeply held through the attempts of students to retain the independent projects. However, the curricular change provided a scaffold for first-year students not full-prepared to engage in self-directed learning. Thus, the change to the curriculum might have contributed to their dramatic increase in the number of students who graduate. Despite the successes in increasing the graduation rate, the campus remains engaged in debates on how best to enhance their practice of liberal arts education.

The shared sense of mission among students, faculty, and administrators at Apple and Maple appears to promote continuous cooperation and debate on institutional practices (Meyerson & Johnson, 1993; Senge, 1990; Shinn, 2004). In turn, the quality of liberal arts education at these two colleges depends, in large measure, upon the continued commitment of internal stakeholders to the unconventional educational ideals of their colleges. Despite the importance of a shared mission for the continuance of liberal arts education practice, many participants in the current work highlighted the emerging priorities of a new generation of students and faculty as the two examples of episodic organizational change that could challenge their deeply held institutional values.

Current demographic shifts in the United States contribute to an increase in utilitarianism—i.e., the preference of students for career-based learning over a broad-based liberal arts education. A number of scholars criticize the hegemony of a consumer-mentality at colleges and universities (Delucci, 1997; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Nelson, 2007; Saunders, 2007), yet colleges and universities face the possibility of lower enrollments and decreased rankings if they fail to attract and maintain student consumers. In contrast to many colleges and universities trying to appeal to a broader range of students, students, faculty, and administrators at Apple and Maple stressed the importance of attracting a critical mass of students who value liberal arts education. However, participants deplore the possibility that a growing number of their future students may adhere to the values of a materialistic culture.

Given that extrinsically motivated students would surely feel uncomfortable at a college like Apple or Maple (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al., 1984), societal shifts toward careerism and materialism may make it difficult for countercultural liberal arts colleges to find future students interested in a truly liberal arts education. Perhaps paradoxically, the movement of many institutions away from an authentic liberal arts education—in response to this demographic shift in students—may be contributing to the increased enrollments at colleges like Apple and Maple, as there are fewer institutions available for students who still desire a more personalized and broad-based educational experience.

Countercultural liberal arts colleges should resist admitting students whose goals do not fit the institutional mission, as their values might threaten the ability of those colleges to sustain their traditional commitment to shared governance and collaborative learning. Faculty, administrators, and students at the case institutions criticized a growing tendency among students not to volunteer or engage in college governance. For example, misgivings that the campus community is becoming socially fragmented have taken on greater significance with the wider use of technologies, such as cell phones, iPods, and online social communities. At Maple, participants believed that the development of electronic technologies have negatively impacted the way students communicate. They argued that personal face-to-face, as opposed to electronic, interactions cultivate stronger relationships between students and faculty, and community interaction provides students with a counterbalance to the possible isolation of independent learning. Despite the objections by many, a growing

number of students use these technologies and they continue to shape the social communities at these colleges and universities.

In addition to changes in the student body, the professionalization of faculty represents another incremental organizational change. At Apple and Maple, professionalization signifies a generational divide between recently trained faculty and the traditional faculty who are almost entirely student-focused. The conditions of the faculty labor market promote a focus on research as opposed to teaching (Zusman, 1999). Therefore, more and more, traditionally teaching focused institutions offer appointments to candidates who value research as much as or more than teaching. However, liberal arts colleges cannot afford the same discipline-based resources for research and teaching as research universities. Consequently, research universities entice new generations of faculty candidates through a combination of competitive compensation, research support, and the chance to teach only in one's area of specialization (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Countercultural liberal arts colleges, such as Apple and Maple are struggling to offer competitive faculty compensation and attract generalists to teach all aspects of a discipline (or the even more arduous task of hiring faculty for interdisciplinary positions). At Maple, each full-time faculty member is typically in charge of a particular discipline and maintaining curricular breadth compels new faculty to move beyond their narrow specializations. At Apple, the interdisciplinary structure necessitates a willingness to teach courses and supervise projects that cross disciplinary boundaries. As research universities become increasingly oriented toward

specialized training (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Zusman, 1999), faculty participants at Apple and Maple questioned whether the new generation of faculty shares the same ideals for countercultural liberal arts education.

Apple and Maple now employ faculty who are more research oriented than in the past, but it seems unlikely that these faculty will forgo their commitment to shared governance and student learning. Both Apple and Maple's junior and senior faculty expressed their commitment to academic citizenship, through participation in campus committees, protecting the institution from political disruption, and mentoring students. Thus, Apple and Maple's faculty represent an exception to Zusman's (1999) assertion that the professionalization of institutions of higher education promotes a decline in "academic citizenship." Unlike more conventional institutions of higher education, countercultural liberal arts colleges have not imposed more centralized governing structures or an "administrative estate" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Apple and Maple's resistance to a more centralized or hierarchical form of organizational governance supports Birnbaum's (2004) argument that shared governance is not solely a type of decision-making structure but instead reflects a wider campus culture. Schmidt and Herman (2003) argued that a more commercially-driven and consumer-oriented model of higher education is likely to replace shared governance with a more centralized administrative structure, but it appears that, for the foreseeable future, Apple College and Maple College have maintained their commitment to shared-governance and liberal arts education quite well.

Research Question 3: How do students, faculty, and administrators identify and address the threats facing countercultural liberal arts colleges?

At Apple and Maple, students, faculty, and administrators illuminated the external trends that threaten their future practice of liberal arts education. The current investigation adds support to a wide array of research suggesting that lesser-known liberal arts colleges must contend with changing student demographics (Delucci, 1997; McPherson & Schapiro, 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), the societal preference for career-based education over broad-based education (Astin, 1993, 1998; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Saunders, 2007) and aggressive competition between institutions for resources and students (Breneman, 1994; Koblik, 1999; Neely, 1999). Consequently, participants at Apple College and Maple College appeared most concerned about attracting students and faculty who valued their unique institutional missions.

Faculty and administrators at Apple and Maple expressed concern over the projected decline in the number of high school graduates in the states from which they traditionally recruit students (see Figure 2). Participants argued that their institutions needed an expanded effort to communicate the merits of liberal arts education for a more culturally and ethnically diverse population of high school graduates (Altbach, 1999; Brown, 1996; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

For motivated students, countercultural liberal arts colleges offer the opportunity for unparalleled cognitive and affective growth. Apple and Maple's students described the supportive environment and the satisfaction of surpassing personal expectations for cognitive and affective development. The major independent

projects produced the deepest emotion for Apple and Maple's students, who—at various stages of their final projects—described intense feelings of anxiety, personal responsibility, cognitive growth, and a sense of confidence and personal fulfillment.

The fact that the majority of Apple and Maple alumni attend graduate school demonstrates the academic advantages that these institutions bestow upon the academically diverse group of admitted students. As Pope (1996, 2000, 2006) notes, students at countercultural liberal arts colleges include students who could have gained admittance to more elite liberal arts colleges, as well as students whose experience in a traditional high-school setting stymied their academic achievement. The students who were less successful in other educational settings have the benefit of an extremely academically demanding institutional culture that offers greater academic flexibility for them to explore their interests and strengths.

On average, countercultural liberal arts colleges are twice as likely as elite liberal arts colleges to enroll the nation's most financially needy students (see Figure 1), and these colleges provide the kind of educational opportunities for previously disadvantaged students that teach them to become critical thinkers and outspoken advocates for themselves and others. Importantly, these institutional environments empower historically silenced students by giving them control of their own learning and a voice in the governance of an egalitarian campus community.

Countercultural liberal arts colleges tend to have a long tradition of attracting students with an interest in radical societal change. Indeed, Apple and Maple have historically appealed to students who openly criticize the status quo and demonstrate a

willingness to engage in social activism. The administrations at both institutions appeared accepting of student activism, and apparently, a former president of Apple even described the role of president as the "scratching post" for the student body to have their concerns heard. Specifically, Apple and Maple's students, faculty, and administrators applauded their institution's advocacy for the environment and the rights of people who indentify as homosexual and transgender. Both colleges actively support students with widely stigmatized identities, for example, earning national recognition from *Princeton Review* for the acceptance of homosexuality. Both institutions have members from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community in senior administrative positions and believe that their support for LGBT students will also bring more ethnically diverse students to campus.

Despite campus cultures that upheld tolerance as an important value, participants expressed concern that financial and geographical barriers might limit access to Apple and Maple. Students, faculty, and administrators at both colleges mentioned efforts to bring disadvantaged, urban youth to campus through pre-college programs. However, enrolling more diverse students at Apple or Maple obliges the removal of almost insurmountable financial barriers. Given that students from historically disadvantaged groups typically refrain from taking on student loan debts (Haycock, 2006; Hagedorn & Tierney, 2002), Apple and Maple have to make a convincing argument for them to consider a college with a published cost of attendance that surpasses $40,000 a year. Consequently, the prospect of getting into graduate school does not attenuate concern for economic security, nor is graduate

school the immediate “pay-out” many expect after graduating from a more vocationally-oriented institution (Delucchi, 1997; Breneman, 1994). Moreover, Apple and Maple must overcome the cultural barriers for ethnic minorities to take up residency at a predominantly white institution in a rural community (Randon & Hope, 1996).

Apple and Maple seek to preserve their countercultural educational values by pursuing a specific type of student. Although the case institutions, like other liberal arts colleges, target students with a passion for learning and a desire to be engaged in a community of scholars (Canada, 1999; Hersh, 1999; Levy & Churchill, 1992), Apple and Maple also communicate very specific learning expectations about self-directed learning to perspective students. For example, Maple publically discourages applications from potential students who lack the desire to take personal responsibility for their own learning. Consequently, the marketing messages do not appeal to more mainstream, career-oriented students—a move which may eventually prove problematic, as more students are attending college to obtain high paying jobs (Astin, 1993, 1998; Hawkins, 1999). Despite changing student demographics, Apple and Maple have managed to achieve record student enrollments over the last few years.

Demographic shifts to a more consumer minded student population has yet to impact Apple and Maple’s ability of to attract the tuition revenue needed to finance the tremendously expensive personalized liberal arts education that they offer to students. The record student enrollments have attenuated years of financial strain at both colleges, but the study’s participants expressed concern over the ability of tuition

revenues to meet the colleges' demands in the near future (e.g., maintenance of facilities, recruitment of new faculty, and student financial aid). Consequently, Apple and Maple must contend with a committed—but less affluent—alumni base, due to the youth of the institution and the tendency for graduates to pursue careers in service professions and non-profit organizations (Pope, 1996, 2000, 2006).

Since the early 1980s, colleges and universities in all sectors have faced greater competition for financial resources as a consequence of declines in sources of public support (Zusman, 1999) and increased competition between higher education institutions for an increasingly limited population of traditional college students (Jonsen, 1984; McPherson & Schapiro, 1999; Wenzlau, 1983). Under greater competition for resources, most colleges and universities emulate "benchmark institutions" that have the commercially-driven and consumer-oriented practices to make them more competitive in attracting donations, students, and prestige (Epper, 1999; Monks & Ehrenburg, 1999; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 2001). In contrast, Apple and Maple seek to offer an alternative to the typical values and practices of higher education.

However, in an effort to fully fund their institution's liberal arts education mission, the administrators at Apple and Maple colleges have increased enrollment. Faced with increasing institutional costs, increasing student enrollment often appears the most straightforward way to increase revenue. Unfortunately, enrollment increases often contribute to a "treadmill effect," as greater enrollment engenders the need for more revenues to attenuate the strain on campus facilities and faculty

resources. Apple and Maple administrators realize a critical need for building maintenance and basic additional facilities to support the growth in student enrollment. Moreover, some administrators at Apple and Maple believe that enrollment growth and tuition charges are nearing the point of diminishing returns and that their institution needs other revenue sources to assuage tuition dependency and help address issues with faculty compensation, facilities, and student financial aid. Given that enrollments have reached an optimum level at both Apple and Maple, adding additional students would raise the cost substantially, as the institutions would need to expand resources (new buildings, faculty, etc.). On this issue, both colleges have plans to update and expand facilities to better support their record enrollments.

In addition, both institutions have implemented plans to grow the size of the faculty and staff, who often feel stretched under the increased enrollments. For example, at Apple College, the change from a project-based to a course-based first-year curriculum and the increase in enrollment has likely contributed to the use of more part-time faculty. At Maple, in addition to an increase in student enrollment, students and faculty described their concerns about forthcoming faculty retirements and retaining junior faculty. In both cases, these institutional changes signal a potential challenge to the continuance of close student-faculty relationships, as having faculty (whether part-time, visiting, or full-time) leave the institution during a student's residency should dramatically disrupt a campus culture based on student-faculty collaboration and mentorship. Given the importance of student-faculty interaction, both colleges must follow through on their plan to hire and retain more

full-time faculty, as the current trends may jeopardize the unique collaborative relationships that distinguish these countercultural colleges. Therefore, securing financial resources from sources other than tuition revenues have become a priority for both Apple and Maple College.

Apple and Maple share concerns over the growing competition from other institutions for resources (e.g. faculty, students, and donations), but they have chosen to continue their traditional criticism of the academy, and more specifically to promote unconventional practices in undergraduate education. These case institutions demonstrate that it is possible to resist conventional higher education practices by working to develop a niche audience (Kondra & Hinings, 1998; Toma et al., 2005). Liberal arts colleges must engage in greater collaboration between one another in order to target the small subset of traditional students most inclined to enroll at institutions that practice liberal arts education. Collaboration with other liberal arts colleges may provide added opportunities to reach more students suited to thrive in an unconventional liberal arts education environment.

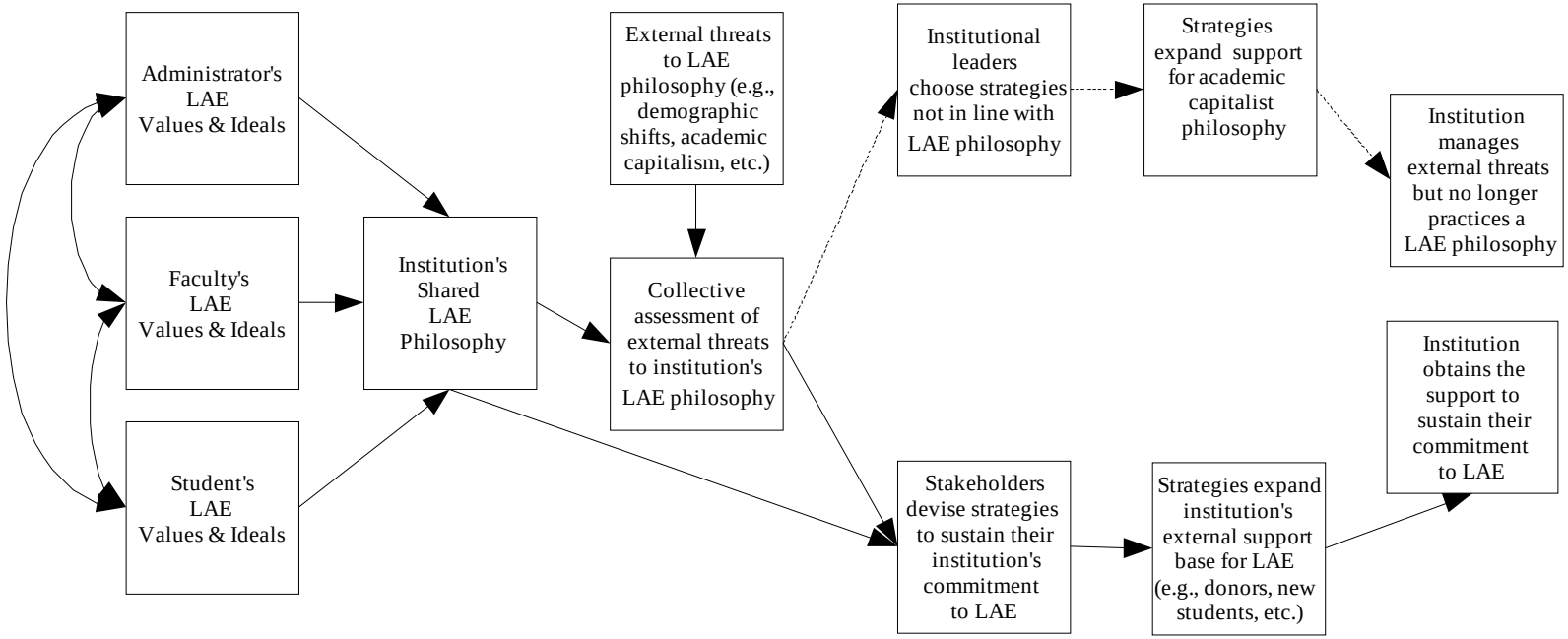
The upcoming demographic challenges make it essential for lesser-known liberal arts colleges to communicate the distinctive advantages liberal arts education offers to students from a broad array of academic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Liberal arts colleges must also demonstrate that a broad-based liberal arts education teaches students to communicate critically for life, as well as work, in a rapidly changing information-based society. The Apple and Maple model of education confers a number of developmental advantages upon a particular type of student. These two

countercultural liberal arts colleges make an indispensable contribution to the diversity of educational options in American higher education.

Lastly, Figure 6 offers a summary of the present study's findings. The model outlines the process by which institutions address threats to liberal arts education. Apple and Maple represent institutions where administrators, faculty, and students hold many common beliefs about the educational and environmental structures needed to support liberal arts education. Apple and Maple's deeply-shared philosophy of liberal arts education have aided internal stakeholders with the identification of external threats to the continuation of their mission. The administrations at both case institutions encouraged the extensive involvement of students and faculty in the development of strategies to sustain their intuition's commitment to liberal arts education for the twenty-first century. Both intuitions have implemented strategies that have expanded external support for their institutions by attracting record student enrollments and more opportunities to collaborate with other liberal arts colleges to enhance their educational practices. If Apple and Maple did not have the shared institutional commitment to liberal arts education, the leaders of these colleges might decide to enact strategies that were not supportive of liberal arts education, and thus these institutions would likely become more commercially-oriented and vocationally-focused. However, Apple and Maple's internal stakeholders continue to take the necessary steps to sustain their institutional commitment to a liberal arts education. Thus, these two colleges continue to demonstrate their ability to thrive as

countercultural liberal arts colleges in opposition to an increasingly academic capitalist philosophy of higher education.

Figure 6. A process model outlining an institution's ability to overcome external threats to liberal arts education (LAE).



Note. Dotted lines indicate the outcome for liberal arts colleges that abandon their commitment to LAE

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

Institutions of higher education continue to adjust their practices in order to respond to greater competition with other institutions for students, faculty, institutional prestige, and financial resources (Neely, 1999; Ehrenberg, 2002; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Despite a wealth of research on changes underway in public research universities and community colleges (Altbach, 1999; Zusman, 1999), very few research studies investigate changes in small liberal arts colleges, perhaps because higher education scholars and the public often perceive most liberal arts colleges as financially sound and academically elite (Astin, 1999). The current work examined two lesser-known liberal arts colleges (i.e. Apple and Maple colleges) that lacked the national reputation and financial resources of elite liberal arts institutions. These countercultural colleges find themselves under increasing pressures to compromise their liberal arts education practices and to conform to a business model of higher education in order to attract external support. However, the internal stakeholders of Apple and Maple colleges provided a case for meeting the challenges to liberal arts education, which can inform practitioners of higher education as well as provide a new direction for future research on liberal arts education. The following sections present the implications, directions for future research, and final conclusions for the current investigation.

Implications

An educational consumer-mentality in different ways threatens the future sustainability of the liberal arts education philosophy at countercultural colleges. The viewpoints and experiences of students, faculty, and administrators at Apple and

Maple colleges formed the core for the current investigation. I asked Apple and Maple's participants to describe their perception of liberal arts education, organizational change, and the challenges threatening their respective colleges. Theories of liberal arts education (Blaich et al., 2004; Pope, 1996, 2000, 2006), organizational change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Senge, 1990; Lewin, 1951) and adult learning (Knowles, 1980; Kolb, 1984) provided additional support for understanding the participants' views on the values, changes, and challenges at Apple and Maple. The current findings have implications for internal members of the case institutions (i.e. students, faculty, and administrators) and for those outside Apple and Maple (e.g., other liberal arts colleges, higher education scholars).

Implications for the Case Institutions

In the current work, I examine the institutional values, major changes, and challenges facing two specific countercultural colleges. In gathering the data for the current work, I interviewed several students, faculty, and administrators at both institutions, and in order to share their perspectives, these internal stakeholders had to reflect upon these institutional issues and articulate their unique viewpoint. In doing this, I hope that I have aided in an ongoing process at both colleges to assess the state of the institution and plan for the future. In my summary of findings, I have attempted to integrate the varied perspectives of my participants to paint a vivid picture of each college's institutional landscape, and in addressing my research questions, I have attempted to find the common connections that unite these two distinctive institutions. In doing so, I offer Apple and Maple the opportunity to view their institution from an outsider's perspective (granted an outsider who has attempted to truly understand the

heart of the institutional culture through the eyes of its members). From this, I hope members of these colleges can use this information to gauge future threats to the institution and work proactively as a collective to address potential challenges, before they pose a risk to the fulfillment of the college's mission.

Such efforts are not new to these colleges, as they must continually anticipate potential threats and develop strategies to address these challenges that further (rather than degrade) the tenets of their institutional values. One example of this monitoring and adjustment involves the issue of student attrition. At Apple and Maple colleges, the students have a distinctive responsibility for designing their own learning and participating in campus governance. Thus, the sustainability of this unique educational environment requires that these institutions attract traditional aged college students who have the necessary abilities and motivation to complete the rigorous program of study. However, even at Apple and Maple, concerns have surfaced regarding the ability of many young adults to handle the demands of directing their own learning experiences.

Apple and Maple realized that some of their students struggled in a situation that required students to take initiative and monitor their own progress. At Apple, the institution changed the first-year curriculum from independent faculty supervised projects to elective course curricula, in order to provide a more solid foundation for future independent work. Many of Apple's faculty and administrators hailed the new program as a better method for preparing new students for their final years of study. In line with this assertion, since the transition to the new Division One curricular change, Apple has been more successful at retaining and graduating students. Despite

this apparent success, Apple continues to struggle to appease students who are prepared to direct their own curricula (and may thus be frustrated with the new first year system), while simultaneously supporting those students who need more time to develop the necessary habits and skills. A grassroots student movement has addressed these concerns by providing students who want the opportunity to complete the traditional independent projects (in addition to the new first year courses) with student mentors to help guide them through the process. The college faculty and administration appear to support this student movement, as they advertise this student group on the college's webpage.

Maple's faculty, students, and administrators indicated a need to better moderate the impact of Maple's curricula on traditional students. Although Maple's first year program in many ways resembles Apple's new Division One, Maple has similarly tried to address retention issues. However, in contrast to Apple's curricular changes, Maple places greater efforts on communicating with prospective students about the expectations and realities of the self-directed learning culture. Whereas Apple strategy involves better preparing students for self-directed learning, Maple attempts to attract students who can handle (or at least believe they can handle) the immense responsibility of crafting their own learning.

Both efforts may have been successful, as both colleges have improved the rate at which students persist to graduation. Maple's six-year graduation rate for 2007 was around 60% (an improvement from 46% in 2003) while Apple's graduation rate just surpassed 70% (an improvement from 57% in 2003). Some of the differences between the colleges may stem from the large transfer population at Maple who do not

count in the graduation rate. Apple attracts a greater percentage of students who are first time college students, which explains their recent decision to reorient the first year curriculum to better prepare students for more independent learning. Both institutions realize that the close knit social communities of small liberal arts colleges are particularly disrupted by a high level of student attrition.

Although Apple and Maple take slightly different approaches to immersing their students in self-directed curricula, both uphold their ideals that students should take responsibility for their own learning. Research demonstrates that expectations for students can often lead to self-fulfilling prophecies—either positive or negative (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1966). All too often, traditional aged students struggle to think for themselves, develop leadership skills, or take personal responsibility, while many educational settings view students as "kids" who lack the maturity to learn on their own or participate in institutional decision making beyond student activities. Institutions that think of students as "kids" produce students who are less likely to become mature and well-rounded adults over their time in college. In contrast, Apple and Maple demonstrate the importance of maintaining institutional expectations of learner responsibility, which allow students to excel in academic and leadership situations.

As evidenced by the above example, both Apple and Maple reside in a state of self-reflection, and actively seek to evolve in a changing landscape. Both of the institutions felt the need to address a student attrition problem, but rather than watering down their academic program, both colleges sought solutions that increased student success and reinforced the colleges' mission. Both institutions have attempted

to engage their respective campus communities in discussions about the state of the institution. Apple's *Directional Document 1/2* has helped get the campus community involved in thinking about where the college is and where it needs to go. Maple's town hall meeting provides the perfect context for discussing institutional changes and challenges in an open and accepting environment, where all stakeholders have a voice. As a whole, the current work may add to this ongoing discussion and help guide future action.

Despite successful efforts to address concern about student retention, Apple and Maple face several other challenges that will eventually require the same level of collective investigation and problem-solving. Although both institutions consider themselves in a strong financial position, they anticipate the need to grow their infrastructures, endowments, and academic resources (e.g., more full-time faculty). By highlighting these issues, I hope my research will mobilize stakeholders to focus directly on these challenges and work together to find creative solutions to these problems.

In order to solve these problems, Apple and Maple will need effective leadership. Effective leadership at countercultural colleges requires administrators to understand the shared values of the whole campus community, in order to build support for organizational changes. By involving students and faculty in assessment, planning, and decision-making, administrators can benefit from a more diverse exchange of solutions and should ultimately achieve a wider sense of ownership for the agreed upon strategies and policy changes. Fortunately, both institutions have a long tradition of shared governance, as well as student and faculty activism.

Implications for Those outside the Case Institutions

In order to meet the diverse learning needs of society, higher education must offer diverse system of educational practices (Hagedorn & Tierney, 2002; Haycock, 2006). Countercultural colleges contribute to the diversity of higher education by providing a personalized, broad-based educational experience to students from a wide array of academic backgrounds (Pope, 1996, 2000, 2006). In the current work, I have attempted to underscore the significant contributions that these one of a kind institutions make to the American system of higher education. Apple and Maple both provide students who crave more autonomy in crafting their educational experience the chance to thrive. In this section, I elaborate on how this case study of these two institutions can inform other liberal arts colleges and the wider field of higher education.

Administrators and faculty at other liberal arts colleges comprise the most likely audience for the current work. Given the societal changes that impact higher education (e.g., careerism, competition for resources, demographic shifts), many lesser-known liberal arts colleges are searching for ways to adjust to changes while staying true to their academic tradition of liberal arts education. Although many colleges have adopted a practice of benchmarking, which could lead to greater homogenization, the current work demonstrates the advantages of enhancing and communicating aspects of the institution that make it unique, as well as targeting potential faculty, students, parents, and donors who share the institution's educational values and goals.

The failure of most liberal arts colleges to appeal to the increasingly career-oriented nature of a more diverse student population likely contributes to the decline in the percentage of students attending liberal arts colleges and ultimately a decline in the total number of liberal arts colleges (Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997; McPherson & Schapiro, 1999). Perhaps because of a decline in the number of liberal arts colleges, Apple and Maple have actually increased their enrollments, while holding true to their core educational values.

Liberal arts colleges often market themselves by highlighting how a liberal arts education prepares students to think critically in both their personal and professional lives (Hersh, 1999). However, faculty and administration at Apple and Maple believe that more collaboration among countercultural liberal arts colleges is needed to make the public aware of the value of a liberal arts education and attract students who hold the necessary values, motivation, and maturity to excel in these institutions. In addition, Apple and Maple argue that greater collaboration between liberal arts colleges enhances liberal arts education, by offering more opportunity to examine other institutions' educational practices. For example, one faculty at Maple, discussed the importance of consortia for sharing ideas about educational practices. Moreover, joint efforts between liberal arts colleges (like the effort by members of the Educational Conservancy and the Annapolis Group to boycott *U.S. News and World Report* rankings) can serve as advocacy for liberal arts education in the larger higher education arena. Although collaboration is important for addressing common external challenges to liberal arts education, institutions should not discard their own unique educational practices (i.e. Apple's narrative evaluations, Maple's town hall

governance) in favor of successful strategies at similar institutions. Such benchmarking could lead to homogenization, thus diminishing the unique character of each institution.

In a competitive system, countercultural liberal arts colleges must contend with the advantages and disadvantages of being an outlier. Historically, Apple and Maple directed criticism toward common operating and educational practices of higher education and did not question the effectiveness of their own practices. The current investigation demonstrates that these countercultural institutions no longer resist reflecting upon their own organizational practices. To be successful in today's higher education market, liberal arts colleges have to articulate that their distinctive form of education proffers developmental advantages to the potential students, faculty members, and society in general. Thus, liberal arts colleges must willingly examine themselves and collaborate with other providers of liberal arts education to achieve institutional legitimacy.

Outside of the relevance to liberal arts colleges, the current investigation provides a wider appeal by presenting a model (see Figure 6) to explain the relationship between organizational values, changes, and challenges at two institutions. Apple and Maple's participants shared similar views about the mission of the institution, which led to congruent perspectives on both the changes occurring and external threats facing their institutions. The shared sense of mission has allowed internal stakeholders to work together to develop strategies to respond to the external challenges that face their respective colleges. Other types of institutions that have highly focused missions (e.g., historically black colleges and universities, art and

design schools, religiously affiliated institutions, etc.) could utilize the organizational strategies employed at Apple and Maple to reassert their institutional mission and unify their internal stakeholders to respond to organizational threats.

In addition to insights into how countercultural colleges respond to new challenges, the current work showcases two institutions that approach teaching and learning in a revolutionarily different way than most educational institutions at every level (e.g., primary, secondary, post-secondary). Despite the call across the field of education to cater to individuals with diverse learning styles (Gardner, 1983), many K-12 schools—and even most post-secondary institutions—base their educational structure on a system of extrinsic reward (e.g., letter grades and honor rolls). Perhaps for this reason, some students who attend Apple and Maple find it difficult to adjust to a system based on intrinsic motivation, while others welcome the unusual amount of freedom and flexibility that the curricula at Apple and Maple offer. For many students, rigidly structured educational environments (e.g., pre-determined major course requirements, lecture based classrooms, and a focus on rote memorization) can stifle individuals' intrinsic interest in intellectual exploration and self-reflection. Indeed, psychologists and educational theorists have noted the cognitive and affective benefits to be gained from environments that allow individuals the ability to direct and construct their own learning experiences (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, in this sense, other educational institutions and organizations could benefit from studying two institutions that have successfully implemented a system that allows for a truly student-directed education.

Even outside the classroom, Apple and Maple's high levels of student involvement in campus governance provide a template for how to increase student engagement and foster student responsibility. By entrusting students with greater responsibility (e.g. participating in major institutional decisions, having unsupervised access to campus facilities, involvement in hiring and promotion of student focused personnel) Apple and Maple's students feel a sense of civic duty that may be lacking in students today. The educational benefits that students at countercultural liberal arts college receive provide a compelling case of what a student body could achieve as far as governance and respect for institutional property and members of the campus community. Although adopting these techniques at the primary and secondary level could place institutions at risk financially and legally, a wider sense of community ownership would benefit institutions at all levels.

Directions for Future Research

Although the current work addressed my three specific research questions, the study I conducted also brings to light other possible avenues for future exploration. The interviews with participants at Apple and Maple demonstrated a shared commitment to the philosophy of liberal arts education and their own distinct institutional missions. These shared ideals informed their perceptions of external threats to the institution and their strategies for organizational change. However, future research is needed to assess perceptions and responses to institutional challenges in settings where educational values may differ among internal stakeholders. In larger colleges and universities, internal stakeholders typically hold a wide variety of values and priorities. As the size of an institution increases, the role of

individual members becomes more specialized, which can lead to competing interests. For example, administrators may exhibit greater concerns about enrollment management and the financial health of the institution, while faculty concern themselves more with the quality of students' academic experience and their own professional research responsibilities, and students may be more concerned about the social environment of the campus and the utility of their education. Future research needs to examine the implications for organizational decision-making when the ideals of various groups on a college campus are not in congruence. Research needs to examine how negotiating shared institutional ideals might lead to greater levels of institution commitment and a more unified response to organizational challenges.

In addition, future research should examine how appropriate self-directed learning is for traditional age college students. Apple and Maple require self-directed learning beyond what is typical in conventionally structured colleges. Knowles and colleagues (1984) suggest that as people mature, they move from being dependent to independent "self-directing human beings." The question is, at what point do most people become ready to take on the awesome task of guiding their own educational experience. Few would deny the need for and importance of some degree of self-directed learning at the undergraduate level. However, the implementation of self-directed learning becomes problematic when people are not ready for it, fail to understand it, and do not know how to prepare for it. In these situations, faculty play a crucial role in serving as mentors and facilitating students' independent work. Thus, the current work provides a starting point for examining how self-directed learning

can operate as a method for learning in young adults and the institutional support needed to make it an effective learning tool.

Furthermore, future research should explore readiness for self-directed learning through the psychological concept of "personal need for structure" (Thompson, Naccarato, & Parker, 1989; Neuburg & Newsom, 1993). According to Thompson and colleagues (1989) certain types of people are more comfortable with structured environments and other types of people are better prepared to deal with ambiguity. Thus, an examination of the relationship between a student's need for structure and institutional control might illuminate a contributing factor in student development and attrition. Students who feel overly constrained at traditional institutions could benefit from a more self-directed environment (like those offered at Apple and Maple), whereas others might find the "free floating" environment of these two colleges to be stressful. Given that the construct of personal need for structure is thought to be relatively stable, such considerations should be taken into account when parents, students, and guidance counselors consider where students should apply to college.

Conclusion

American higher education faces a growing dominance of academic capitalism—a more commercially-driven and consumer-oriented system of higher education (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004)—which could ultimately impede the ability of lesser-known liberal arts colleges to adhere to the principles of liberal arts education (Breneman, 1994). In the current work, I presented a case study of two institutions that have managed maintain their liberal arts education tradition in the face of external challenges by focusing on their shared commitment to institutional values. I hope that

by illuminating their ongoing process of self-assessment and collective efforts to address external challenges the current work informs other institutions struggling to survive in a shifting academic landscape or searching for new ways to reform their methods for teaching and learning. Finally, I hope that the current work has established the significance of these unique institutions in the American system of higher education. As Margaret Meade (1935/1963) noted, "If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place" (p. 322). In line with this sentiment, each diverse learner deserves an educational experience suited to their unique needs, and therefore we must work as a society to ensure that these enriching environments survive and thrive.

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FOOTNOTE

[1] To protect the anonymity of case institutions, I created pseudonyms to refer to all the authors and titles of institutional documents. In addition, I do not cite the page number of the quotation instead I use the phrase “page omitted.”

APPENDIX A

REQUEST FOR INSTITUTIONAL PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

Dear President of *** College,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Oklahoma. I am interested in colleges that change lives (See Loren Pope's *40 Colleges that Change Lives* , 2000), given their record of providing access to motivated students from diverse academic and economic backgrounds and their exceptional educational outcomes. The purpose of my study is to investigate how colleges that change lives are developing strategies to address external threats/challenges to their liberal arts educational missions (e.g. competition for students, societal emphasis on career focused education, changing societal demographics). I am interested in Apple do to its unique curriculum, short institutional history, membership in a consortia, and location in a competitive region for private higher education. I would like to conduct on-site interviews with senior administrators, faculty, and students at your institution. Apple will be 1 of 3 life changing colleges that I hope to study for my dissertation.

I am in the process of obtaining Institutional Research Board approval from the University of Oklahoma and will provide all documents to Apple regarding my study procedures including my protection of confidentiality of participants. Getting IRB approval requires the approval from Apple to interview and/or observe the students, faculty, and administrators on your campus. Please let me know if Apple would be willing to participate and if there are any requirements at your institution to do this kind of research. I would like to conduct this research during the 2007-2008 academic year.

Sincerely,

Paul Prewitt-Freilino
Principle Investigator
Doctoral Candidate
The University of Oklahoma
paulfreilino@ou.edu
401-254-5756

APPENDIX B

LETTER GRANTING APPLE COLLEGE SITE APPROVAL

Dear Mr. Prewitt-Freilino,

Thank you for your note. I am delighted to know that you are looking into "colleges that change lives" and Apple among them. I think but that this is true and that Loren Pope's book has had a profound impact.

I have shared your request with several on campus, and my recommendation is that as your research plans proceed, you be in touch with Professor [redacted], Apple's Dean of Academic Development, who can coordinate your work here and answer questions about protocols (and many other things as well). I have copied him on this message so that you have one another's email addresses; with this email I am also letting VP and Dean of the Faculty know about your work. Many of us will look forward to talking to you when you come, because as you can well imagine, we are all very passionate about Apple and proud of our distinctive profile among American institutions of higher
education.

Best,
[redacted]

Office of the President
[redacted]

Phone Number
[redacted]

APPENDIX C

LETTER GRANTING MAPLE COLLEGE SITE APPROVAL

Hello Paul,

I'm pleased to report that after consideration of your responses to our questions, Maple College is now able to issue a statement to your IRB that you are welcome to come to include Maple in your dissertation research. If the IRB needs something more formal please let me know.

Please note that our own Research Review Board will now consider your proposal, and may have some questions for you about the specific procedures that you will follow. I will be out of town until next week, when I will distribute the proposal to them and ask for the Committee's feedback.

[redacted], Ph.D.
Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs
phone: [redacted]

APPENDIX D: LETTER GRANTING IRB APPROVAL

The University of Oklahoma

OFFICE FOR HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PROTECTION

IRB Number: 11737
Approval Date: June 21, 2007

June 22, 2007

Paul Prewitt-Freilino
Dept. of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
2214 S. Santa Fe Ave. Apt 203
Moore, OK 73160

RE: Challenges to Liberal Arts Education

Dear Mr. Prewitt-Freilino:

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. This study meets the criteria for expedited approval category 6, 7. It is my judgment as Chairperson of the IRB that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected; that the proposed research, including the process of obtaining informed consent, will be conducted in a manner consistent with the requirements of 45 CFR 46 as amended; and that the research involves no more than minimal risk to participants.

This letter documents approval to conduct the research as described:

Other Dated: June 21, 2007 [redacted] College Site Approval Email
Other Dated: June 05, 2007 [redacted] College Site Approval
Other Dated: June 05, 2007 [redacted] College Site Approval Email
Consent form - Subject Dated: June 05, 2007 Revised
IRB Application Dated: June 05, 2007 Revised
Survey Instrument Dated: May 14, 2007 Interview - Student
Survey Instrument Dated: May 14, 2007 Interview - Administration/Faculty
Letter Dated: May 14, 2007 Recruitment Letter - Student
Letter Dated: May 14, 2007 Recruitment Letter -Administrator/Faculty
Protocol Dated: May 14, 2007
IRB Application Dated: May 14, 2007 Revised

As principal investigator of this protocol, it is your responsibility to make sure that this study is conducted as approved. Any modifications to the protocol or consent form, initiated by you or by the sponsor, will require prior approval, which you may request by completing a protocol modification form. All study records, including copies of signed consent forms, must be retained for three (3) years after termination of the study.

The approval granted expires on June 20, 2008. Should you wish to maintain this protocol in an active status beyond that date, you will need to provide the IRB with an IRB Application for Continuing Review (Progress Report) summarizing study results to date. The IRB will request an IRB Application for Continuing Review from you approximately two months before the anniversary date of your current approval.

If you have questions about these procedures, or need any additional assistance from the IRB, please call the IRB office at (405) 325-8110 or send an email to irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

E. Laurette Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW

September 7, 2007

[Insert Name],

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Oklahoma. As a part of my dissertation, I am interviewing faculty, students, and administrators at three life-changing liberal arts colleges (Pilot College, Apple College, and Maple College) to determine how the practice of liberal arts education is evolving. I am interested in Apple due to its unique curriculum, institutional history, and location in a competitive region for private higher education. Ultimately, I hope this research will illuminate strategies for maintaining a liberal arts education in the face of competition for students, societal emphasis on career focused education, and changing societal values.

I will be conducting 30-minute one-on-one interviews on Apple's campus Wednesday October 10, 2007 and Thursday October 11, 2007. If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email and we can schedule a specific time-slot. I will also provide you with further information about the study and interview process. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
Paul Prewitt-Freilino
Principle Investigator
Doctoral Candidate
The University of Oklahoma
paulfreilino@ou.edu
401-254-5756

This research has been approved by The University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board and Apple College.

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE PARTCIPANT SCHEDULING CORRESPONDENCE

Dear [Participant Name],
I am delighted that you have agreed to contribute to my dissertation research on small colleges. I have attached the informed consent which outlines the details of the study including information about how the data will be used. Please select your time from the list below and let me know the location that you would like me to me with you. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this topic.

Thanks Again,
Paul

Monday, October 8, 2007 8:10 a.m.
Monday, October 8, 2007 9:00 a.m.
Monday, October 8, 2007 10:00 a.m.
Monday, October 8, 2007 11:00 a.m.
Monday, October 8, 2007 12:00 p.m.
Monday, October 8, 2007 1:00 p.m.
Monday, October 8, 2007 2:00 p.m.
Monday, October 8, 2007 3:00 p.m.
Monday, October 8, 2007 4:00 p.m.
Monday, October 8, 2007 5:00 p.m.

Tuesday, October 9, 2007 8:10 a.m.
Tuesday, October 9, 2007 9:00 a.m.
Tuesday, October 9, 2007 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday, October 9, 2007 11:00 a.m.
Tuesday, October 9, 2007 12:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 9, 2007 1:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 9, 2007 2:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 9, 2007 3:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 9, 2007 4:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 9, 2007 5:00 p.m.

Paul Prewitt-Freilino
Principle Investigator
Doctoral Candidate
The University of Oklahoma
paulfreilino@ou.edu
401-254-5756

This research has been approved by The University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX G

INFORMED CONSENT

University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title:	Challenges to Liberal Arts Education
Principal Investigator:	Paul Prewitt-Freilino
Department:	Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

You are being asked to volunteer for this research study. This study is being conducted at Apple College, Maple College, and Pilot College. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a student leader, faculty member, or administrator who is involved in the daily life of the college that you represent.

Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how the practice of liberal arts education is evolving in the context of liberal arts colleges. This study will help educational leaders who are interested in balancing the practice of liberal arts education with the demands of the 21st century.

Number of Participants

About 90 people will take part in this study. Specifically, as many as 10 students, 10 faculty, and 10 administrators will participate from each college.

Procedures and Length of Participation

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

Participate in **TWO separate one-on-one interviews** with the researcher where you will be asked questions related to your role at the college. The first interview will last around 30 minutes and a 30 minute follow-up interview will also be scheduled for a later date. During the follow up interview you will be asked to verify or comment on your responses from the initial interview.

Risks and Benefits

Participation in this study should incur no foreseeable risks to your health or well-being beyond those present in normal everyday life. You will benefit by contributing your perspective on challenges to liberal arts education at your liberal arts college. Scholars and educational decision-makers who are interested in retaining or changing the educational environment of liberal arts colleges will benefit from your insights.

Rights and Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the interview at *any* time without penalty. By agreeing to participate in this research, you do not waive any of

your legal rights. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question and may choose to withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality

In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you without your permission. In published reports the colleges that participate will *not* be identified. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers will have access to the records. There are organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis. These organizations include the OU Institutional Review Board.

Cost and Compensation

There is no cost to participate in this study. In addition you will not be reimbursed for you time and participation in this study.

Audio Recording of Study Activities

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews will be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. Please select one of the following options.

I consent to audio recording. ___ Yes ___ No.

Contacts and Questions

If you have concerns or complaints about the research please contact **Paul Prewitt-Freilino (Principle Investigator)** at 501-690-4315 or email paulfreilino@ou.edu. You may also contact the David Tan, Ph.D. the faculty sponsor at 405-325-5986 or email dtan@ou.edu

Contact the researcher(s) if you have questions or if you have experienced a research-related injury.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the **University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB)** at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature Date

APPENDIX H

LETTER GRANTING PILOT COLLEGE SITE APPROVAL

To: Paul Prewitt-Freilino, M.Ed.
From: [redacted], Ph.D., President
Date: June 4, 2007

Pilot College is pleased to participate in your research for your dissertation. As I mentioned in our phone conversation, you should contact Dr. [redacted], Dr. [redacted] and Dr. [redacted] for your areas of interest.

Dr. [redacted] Dr. [redacted] Dr. [redacted]
[redacted]

If you need further assistance, please feel free to contact my assistant, [redacted], at [redacted] or at [redacted]@Pilot.edu.

Again, it was great to visit with you and I wish you success with your research.

[redacted]
PHONE: [redacted] FAX: [redacted]
EMAIL: President@Pilot.edu WEB: www.Pilot.edu

APPENDIX I

PILOT STUDY ADMINISTRATOR/FACULTY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interviews of faculty and administrators in the pilot study utilized the following 20 questions, however, the format the semi-structured allowed for omission of questions addressed during other parts of the interview.

1. What are your values, beliefs, thinking, and philosophies about the liberal arts curriculum?

2. What programs does the college offer outside of the traditional liberal arts curriculum of undergraduate degrees in the humanities, societal sciences or natural sciences? These areas include professional masters programs and undergraduate or adult education degrees or certificates in technology, business, health, or education career fields.

3. When did the programs develop and how?

4. Is the college interested in holding firmly to the liberal arts curriculum or is there a movement to include more professionally oriented undergraduate and graduate programs? Why?

5. How has this college (a) held firmly to the traditional liberal arts curriculum or (b) moved away from the traditional liberal arts curriculum? Why did this happen?

6. What external environmental factors are of greatest concern to the college and the maintenance or fulfillment of a traditional liberal arts curriculum?

7. How did the college find out about these factors?

8. How did the college assess the significance or importance of these factors vis-à-vis on changes they need to make?

9. Did a strategic planning process taking place? What were the complications and complexities of the planning process? How were conflicts and disagreements resolved?

10. Why is the college responding to these issues and in what ways is the college responding?

11. Specifically what tactics have been utilized to address these issues?

12. How did these tactics get implemented? Who was involved? What complications did they face? How did they deal with them? Any persuasion on campus that they need to do?

13. Who were the campus stakeholders that were or were not supportive and why? How were the non-supporters dealt with?

14. What have been the positive and negative unintended consequences of policy or curriculum modifications that were related to external challenges?

15. What curriculum modifications to the LA curriculum have been made in recent years at the college?

16. Why were these curriculum changes made? Any complexities in the process of change? How were these complexities resolved?

17. How did these changes get implemented? Who was involved in the planning or decision-making process?

18. How was this resistance resolved or alleviated?

19. Who were the campus stakeholders that were supportive or not supportive and why?

20. What is the role of faculty? Has this role changed in any way since you have worked at the college?

APPENDIX J

PILOT STUDY STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interviews of students in the pilot study utilized the following 12 questions, however, the format the semi-structured allowed for omission of questions addressed during other parts of the interview.

1. What is it like to be a student at this college? What has been your experience academically and socially?

2. How has the student experience or the same while you have been enrolled? Why?

3. What actions/policies/strategies has the college implemented to maintain of change the student experience? Why did they impact the student experience?

4. What was the role of students in the development of these policies/strategies?

5. Describe the academic culture at this college?

6. Is this culture different in any way from when you first enrolled? How relative are the impact of these changes on your collegiate experience, one way or the other?

7. What curricular changes have been made that you find important or not important and why (e.g. new requirements, majors, ect)?

8. Why do you think that these changes were made, and how have they affected you in your collegiate experience?

9. What do you believe attracts students to the college?

10. What attracted you to this college?

11. Describe the type of students that this college is interested in attracting? How has this changed and/or remained the same?

12. Is this college making decisions that will make it stronger or more successful in the future? Why/Why not?

APPENDIX K:

INTERVIEW FOR APPLE AND MAPLE PARTICIPANTS

1. What makes Apple/Maple College unique from other colleges and university?
2. How does the residential liberal arts education at Apple/Maple prepare students for life after college?
3. How are Apple/Maple students different and similar to other students who are seeking to attend college in the U.S.?
4. What are the greatest changes that have taken place at Apple/Maple since you arrived?
5. What do you think is the most significant challenge facing the college in the future?
6. What should be done (or is been done) to address this challenge?
7. What role do faculty play in the learning culture of Apple/Maple?
8. What role do students play in the learning culture of Apple/Maple?
9. What role do administrators play in the learning culture of Apple/Maple?