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The Experiences of Community College Trustees During Their First Year of Service: A Phenomenological Study

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THE EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES DURING THEIR FIRST YEAR OF SERVICE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Abstract

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The global economy has created a demand for skills and talent, and while the rest of the world has responded to the global demand for post-secondary skills by increasing attainment, the United States has not. Community colleges are more important today than ever before as they work to produce qualified, skilled workers as well as an educated citizenry so that the United States can remain competitive in a global economy. Boards of trustees govern these community colleges. The boards of trustees have the final authority over the affairs of higher education institutions in the United States, yet very little research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees. This research study focused on the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service on their boards. Participating trustees in this study became ambassadors and advocates for their community colleges, even though those responsibilities were not expected of them. Also, the participants in this study developed relationships with their colleges, their missions, and the students they serve by witnessing students in their moments of triumph during student-centered celebration events.

Keywords: community college trustees, community college mission, community college governance

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been an increase in the calls for improved accountability, equity in educational attainment, and success for all college students by accreditation agencies, legislatures, educational and policy organizations, parents, and the public-at-large (McClenney & Mathis, 2011). During this same time, businesses have placed demands upon colleges to meet the changing needs of the global economy (McClenney & Mathis, 2011). As of 2011, post-secondary educational attainment rates in the United States have been flat for at least six years, while completion rates in other countries have increased (Lumina Foundation, 2014). The United States now ranks 11th in the world in the percentage of people ages 25 to 34 who have earned a post-secondary credential (Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013). More worrisome still are the students in the K-12 education pipeline. The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an internationally standardized exam administered to 15-year-old students (OECD, 2010). The exam focuses on students' abilities to use their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges (OECD, 2010). In 2009, the United States ranked 17th in reading, 31st in math, and 23rd in science among the 65 participating countries (OECD, 2010).

The global economy has created a demand for skills and talent (Lumina Foundation, 2014). Most countries throughout the world have responded to this by increasing higher education attainment of their people (Lumina Foundation, 2014). And while the rest of the world has responded to the global demand for post-secondary skills by increasing attainment, the United States has not (Lumina Foundation, 2014).

The reason for increased educational accountability is simple. The United States workforce will need more workers with post-secondary credentials in order to remain competitive in a global economy. Between 1973 and 2008, the share of jobs in the United States economy that required postsecondary education increased from 28 percent to 59 percent, and the percentage of postsecondary jobs will increase from 59 percent to 63 percent over the next decade (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). As of 2012, the percentage of the United States' working age population, age 25 to 64, with at least an associate degree is 39.4 percent (Lumina Foundation, 2014). By 2018, 22 million new jobs in the United States will require college degrees, but the country will fall short of that number by at least 3 million post-secondary degrees (Carnevale et al., 2010). In addition, jobs in the United States economy will need at least 4.7 million new workers with postsecondary certificates (Carnivale et al., 2010). High school graduates and dropouts will not have the credentials they need in the coming decade as employers seek workers to fill jobs that require postsecondary degrees (Carnevale et al., 2010).

The public attention to community colleges – and the role they can play to help improve the educational attainment of Americans – has grown over the past few years. For example, in 2009 President Obama challenged community colleges throughout the country to graduate an additional five million students by 2020 and play a critical role in the United States once again leading the world with the highest proportion of college graduates (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.). In addition, state governments and private foundations are working diligently to address the large number of students who come to community colleges unprepared for college-level coursework

(Jobs for the Future, 2011). Community colleges are more important today than ever before as they work to produce qualified, skilled workers as well as an educated citizenry so that the United States can remain competitive in a global economy.

Community colleges throughout the country serve as open-door institutions that provide access to higher education to all who desire to learn, regardless of wealth, heritage, or previous academic experience (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). Since their beginnings, community colleges attracted people who could not afford tuition at four-year colleges and universities, as well as people who couldn't attend college full-time, people whose ethnic backgrounds prevented them from going to four-year colleges and universities, people who were not properly prepared for college-level work, people who had to take time away from education, people who had become obsolete in their jobs and needed retraining, people who had never been trained to do a specific job, people who were unable to attend classes on a college campus due to imprisonment or a physical disability, and people who needed to fill their leisure time meaningfully (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). While community colleges are institutions of higher education that are "regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 5), they offer various programs and services to those who otherwise would not be able to obtain post-secondary education. Many community colleges have adopted a comprehensive mission that incorporates transfer, vocational, developmental, and continuing and community educational programs (Bragg, 2001a).

One of the most prominent, fundamental parts of the community college mission is open access. Community colleges ensure open access to higher education for all who

desire it (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). Community college scholars argue that open admission policies are a fundamental reason for the increasing enrollment of diverse student groups in community colleges (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Because they provide programs and services for all of the constituents in their communities regardless of racial, ethnic, economic, or academic circumstances, community colleges rarely exclude anyone from enrolling (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Community college students range from those seeking entrance to transfer programs to those having not yet completed high school and requiring the general equivalence degree (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Community colleges also offer some selective programs, such as the associate degree in nursing. Community college administrators believe that the open access part of the community college mission is the foundation on which all other community college operations rest (Shannon & Smith, 2006). The open door concept influences admissions and enrollment processes, curricular structures, faculty hiring, the relationships between community colleges and four-year institutions, advising and counseling activities, and colleges' responses to the needs of the K–12 sector, as well as those of the local economy (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Open access gives many community college students from low-income or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds the ability to attend college (Shannon & Smith, 2006).

Parallel to the open door mission is the commitment to providing quality education at an affordable cost (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Although community college tuition and fees have increased over the years in response to economic conditions and state and local tax policies, the average price of attending a community college is lower than that of a four-year college, and has not increased at the same rate as tuition and fees

at four-year institutions (Shannon & Smith, 2006). In the 2013-2014 academic year, the national average cost for tuition and fees at public two-year community colleges was $3,364, while the national average cost of in-state, public four-year colleges and universities was $8,893, not including room and board (College Board, n.d.). Without affordable tuition and fees, many community college students would not be able to afford to attend college (Shannon & Smith, 2006). With their commitment to open access, community colleges have become open doors to opportunity to higher education for many Americans.

Boards of trustees govern these community colleges. The boards of trustees have the final authority over the affairs of higher education institutions in the United States (Michael & Schwartz, 2000). Mellow and Heelan (2008) report that while very little research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees, there are community college trustee standards created and promoted by national and state organizations. Several authors, scholars, and practitioners have written various guidelines to help improve trustee governance (Carver, 1997; Chait, Ryan, & Taylor, 2005; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Polonio, 2005; Potter & Phelan, 2008). In addition, practitioners and scholars have written about the establishment of college trustee boards in the United States, the roles trustees play on their boards, characteristics of board members, trustee selection processes, trustees' involvement in academic affairs, competencies boards of trustees should possess, and orientation and professional development programs that currently exist for community college boards of trustees members.

This research study focused on the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service on their boards. My goal was to understand the meaning of trustees' experiences during their first year of service. I developed a better understanding as to how community college trustees who participated in this study learned their roles and responsibilities. I understand what motivated these study participants to serve on their community college boards of trustees. I also understand how the participating trustees in this study developed relationships with their colleges, their missions, and the students they serve.

Problem Statement

Mellow and Heelan (2008) report that very little research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees. Today, community colleges are being called upon to play a critical role in our country's higher education system. Yet, there have been no studies conducted on how community college trustees fit into this phenomenon. In the traditional sense, a community college board of trustees selects the president, evaluates administrators, holds the college's assets, acts as the court of last resort within the college, and maintains a balance between the college's constituents and promoting the college to the larger external community it serves (Rauh, 1969). Ideally, community college trustees empower the college president, along with administrators, to manage the day-to-day operations of the college. In addition, this hands-off approach empowers the faculty to be responsible for academic affairs within the community college. However, community colleges exist in a new normal of decreased public funding and increased public attention. Throughout the United States, momentum has been building since 2009 for more ambitious goals for community college students (Association of Community

College Trustees, 2011). For example, the American Association of Community Colleges' 21st Century Commission pledged to add 5 million more community college graduates to the country's workforce by 2020 (Bundy, 2014). The President of the United States, national foundations including the Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation, and a number of national initiatives like the Voluntary Framework of Accountability and the Governance Institute for Student Success, are all focusing on student completion (ACCT, 2011). Trustees can lend their leadership and influence to improving student completion at their local institutions, at the state level, and collectively at the national level (ACCT, 2011). However, not much scholarship exists on community college trustees in the critical first year of service on their boards, how they learn their roles and responsibilities, and their connections to the colleges and students that they serve.

The development of the modern-day college trustee board can be traced back to 1779, when Harvard University, facing serious financial troubles, turned over control of its assets from clerics, professors, and tutors to members of the business community (Rauh, 1969). Today, trustees are chosen to serve on their respective boards in three ways: appointment, election, and by virtue of position, such as a community college president or county superintendent of public schools serving as ex officio (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Community college trustees are elected in at least 20 states throughout the country, while in other states, community college trustees are appointed by state and local elected officials (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). In the state where this study took place, two community college trustees are appointed to each board by the governor, each county superintendent of schools serves as ex-officio on each community college board,

and the local county government bodies appoint all other trustees. For each community college in this state, 11 people serve as members of each community college's board of trustees, except in the two instances where there are community colleges sponsored by more than one county. In those two cases, two additional members are added to the boards of trustees for each additional county that sponsors the community college. In addition, at least two members of the community college board of trustees must be women.

Engel and Achola (1983) reviewed existing literature on higher education boards of trustees. They reported that community college boards spend more of their time on business and finance, physical plant, and personnel matters than on academic affairs (Engel & Achola, 1983). This is considered the fiduciary role of the college trustee (Chait et al., 2005). In addition, most community college boards simply review and approve decisions already made elsewhere on campus (Engel & Achola, 1983). However, the world has changed for modern day community college trustees. Declining public revenues, as well as increased student enrollments, and increased public attention have all created a new environment for community college governing boards of trustees. Colleges are being asked to respond to these challenges, yet, Kezar and Eckel found that campus decision-making mechanisms are not prepared to handle these complex issues (2004). Many campus leaders have begun the work of rethinking their approach to governance, but limited scholarship exists to guide the efforts of rethinking the approach to higher education governance (Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research study was to understand the meaning of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service on their boards.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer this central research question: What are the meanings of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service? In addition, this study attempted to answer the following sub questions: How do community college trustees learn their responsibilities? What do trustees know about community colleges before joining their boards? How do trustees develop connections to their community colleges, their missions, and their students?

Overview of Methodology

In order to better understand the lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service on their boards, I conducted a qualitative research study. Qualitative research explores and understands the meanings that individuals and groups assign to a problem (Creswell, 2014). Since the experiences of community college trustees in their first year of service is yet to be studied, qualitative research is the best approach since it is best used when little is known about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

Phenomenology is a qualitative method that does not contain explicit theoretical observation, since the researcher attempts to construct meaning from participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). The phenomenological researcher constructs rich, detailed descriptions of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In my study, I worked to construct a description of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees

during their first year of service. I chose this method because as a researcher, I see myself holding a constructivist worldview. Constructivists believe that there are multiple realities, and that those realities are socially and experientially based and specific in nature (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I also chose this method because of the nature of my research questions, which intended to help me develop an understanding of the meaning of a shared lived human phenomenon.

In phenomenology, the researcher collects various linguistic items associated in some way with the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). For this phenomenological study, the linguistic item of most importance was written transcriptions of interviews. The setting of this research study was four community colleges within a state in the Northeast part of the United States. I identified four trustees (one from each community college) who provided experientially rich descriptions of their lived experiences. I then conducted three interviews with each of the four research participants. Seidman (2006) recommends the three interview approach because it allows the researcher to establish a context of the participants' experience, allows participants to construct details of their experiences, and allows participants to reflect on the meanings of those experiences. The purpose of the first interview was to help the participants put their experiences into context by reconstructing the events in their past that place their role as a trustee in the context of their lives (Seidman, 2006). The second interview concentrated on the concrete details of the participants' lived experiences (Seidman, 2006). The third interview served as an opportunity for participants to reflect on the meaning of those experiences (Seidman, 2006).

Rationale and Significance

As previously discussed, the United States workforce will be in need of workers with skilled credentials in order to remain competitive in the global economy. Currently, the United States ranks 11th in the world in the percentage of people ages 25 to 34 who have earned a post-secondary credential (OECD, 2013). Yet, the percentage of jobs in the United States that require postsecondary credentials will increase from 59 percent to 63 percent over the next decade (Carnevale et al., 2010). Now more than ever, community colleges are being called upon to produce more credentialed citizens to enter the workforce.

Nationally, 21.8 million students enrolled in colleges and universities in 2013 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Of these 21.8 million students, 1,132 community colleges enrolled 12.8 million students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). In Fall 2013, 61 percent of all undergraduate students who enrolled in this state's public colleges and universities enrolled at community colleges (New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education, 2014). Nationally and within this state where the study took place, community colleges are the largest providers of higher education. Yet, very little research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). These boards of trustees have the final authority over the affairs of higher education institutions in the United States (Michael & Schwartz, 2000).

According to this state's state law, boards of trustees are responsible for determining the educational curriculum of the college; appointing the college president; appointing college employees upon the nomination of the president; determining the

qualifications, duties, compensation, and terms of office for college employees; setting tuition and fees for students; granting diplomas, certificates, and degrees; entering into contracts with other entities; accepting grants and contributions on behalf of the college; dispersing all funds appropriated to the college by the counties and the state; directing and controlling college expenditures; acquiring, owning, leasing, using, and operating property for college purposes; selling property that is no longer needed for the college; making rules and regulations consistent with general law for the proper administration of the college; exercising all other powers consistent with the rules and regulations necessary for the operation of the college; and establishing and maintaining a dedicated reserve fund for minor capitol needs, not to exceed 3 percent of the replacement value of the college's physical plant (New Jersey Statutes Annotated, 1999).

While there have been laws and how to guides developed to help community college trustees fulfill their duties, there are no phenomenological studies that exist that explore the meaning of the experiences of trustees during their first year of service, or how they become engaged with their colleges during their first year of service. In addition, we do not know just how much trustees know about the community colleges they serve prior to becoming appointed to their boards. We do not know the motivations of people to serve on a community college board of trustees.

Role of Researcher

My role within this research study was first and foremost that of doctoral candidate working to complete his doctorate in education from Rowan University. Next, my role in this research was that of interviewer with the study's participants. As a researcher conducting interviews, my responsibility was to remain objective and

subjective. As van Manen explains, objectivity means that "the researcher remains true to the object" (van Manen, p. 20, 1990). Subjectivity means that the researcher has to be as "perceptive, insightful, and discerning as one can be in order to show or disclose the object in its full richness and in its greatest depth" (van Manen, p. 20, 1990).

Researcher Assumptions

As a staff member for a community college state association in the Northeast region of the United States, I have worked diligently over the past 17 years with community college trustees to address student completion and other challenges they face. The association itself is made up of the president of each community college and the board of trustees chair or his or her designee, making it a 38-member organization. The community college state association serves as the statewide voice of the community college sector, representing community colleges among state leaders, legislators, and policy makers. This state's community colleges operate in a fashion described as coordinated autonomy, where local boards of trustees govern their community colleges, but the trustees and presidents work collectively to address statewide higher educational needs. The main focus of the state association is to advocate on behalf of the state's community colleges for adequate operating and capital support from the state, as well as to weigh in on legislation that affects community colleges, their employees, and their students.

My previous experiences within this community college state association, as well as the lack of scholarly literature on the topic, led me to decide that I wanted to seek a better understanding of the meaning of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees in their first year of service on their boards. With the United States now

ranking 11th in the world in the percentage of people ages 25 to 34 who have earned a post-secondary credential (OECD, 2013), community colleges are more important than ever before as they work to produce qualified, skilled workers as well as an educated citizenry so that the United States can remain competitive in a global economy. Community college boards of trustees play an even more important role as the final authority over the affairs of community colleges. I assumed that community colleges were working diligently to produce more associate degree and certificate holders, and that the student completion agenda was prominently guiding that work.

While the national completion agenda was guiding the work of community colleges, I assumed that community college trustees who participated in this study were concerned with properly carrying out their fiduciary responsibilities. When engaged in the fiduciary role, trustee boards focus on responsibly handling financial oversight of the college (Chait et al., 2005). Existing literature indicates that community college boards spend more of their time on business and finance, physical plant, and personnel matters than on academic affairs (Engel & Achola, 1983).

My goal was to understand the meaning of trustees' experiences in their first year of service. As a result of this study, I have developed a better understanding about how community college trustees learn their roles and responsibilities during their first year of service. I also understand what motivated the participants of this study to serve on community college boards of trustees. I also understand how the participating trustees became engaged with the colleges, their missions, and the students they serve.

In addition, as a researcher I saw myself holding a constructivist worldview. Constructivists believe that there are multiple realities, and that those realities are

socially and experientially based and specific in nature (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I am hoping that this research study will serve as a fundamental resource for community college trustees, presidents, and administrators throughout the country as they work to understand community college trustees and their experiences as part of their boards.

Definition of Key Terminology

Community college board of trustees – The final authority of community college governance, the community college board of trustees creates and adopts policies for its community college and hires one employee – the community college president – to manage day-to-day operations of the college.

Community college trustee – A person appointed to the local community college board of trustees either by local elected officials or by the state's governor.

Comprehensive community college mission – Open access to academic programs that prepare students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities, vocational education aimed to place students in careers immediately upon completing college, general education, and noncredit community and enrichment programs.

Trustee appointment – The manner in which a person joined the community college board of trustees. This can be by appointment from the state's governor or from appointment by the local county governing body.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters: Chapter 1: Introduction; Chapter 2: Literature Review; Chapter 3: Methodology; Chapter 4: Findings; and Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications. This dissertation also contains the following appendices:

Appendix A: Interview Protocol 1; Appendix B: Interview Protocol 2; and Appendix C: Interview Protocol 3.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Community colleges, which started in the early 1900s as junior colleges with the sole purpose of providing the first two years of a four-year college education, have evolved to become democracy's colleges, providing educational opportunities and expanding college enrollments (Dowd, 2003). Community colleges have expanded their missions over time to include open admissions access to traditional college programs, workforce training programs, and community enrichment programs.

Since their beginnings, community colleges have focused on providing access to higher education to those who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to attend college. But over the past decade, there has been an increase in the calls for improved accountability, equity in educational attainment, and success for all college students by accreditation agencies, legislatures, educational and policy organizations, parents, and the public-at-large (McClenney & Mathis, 2011). As of 2011, post-secondary educational attainment rates in the United States have been flat for at least six years, while completion rates in other countries have increased (Lumina Foundation, 2014). The United States now ranks 11th in the world in the percentage of people ages 25 to 34 who have earned a post-secondary credential (OECD, 2013).

The public attention to community colleges – and the role they can play to help improve the educational attainment of Americans – has grown over the past few years. In 2009, President Obama challenged community colleges throughout the country to graduate an additional five million students by 2020 and play a critical role in the United States once again leading the world with the highest proportion of college graduates

(AACC, n.d.). In addition, state governments and private foundations are working diligently to address the large number of students who come to community colleges unprepared for college-level coursework (Jobs for the Future, 2011).

Community colleges are more important today than ever before in helping people earn post-secondary credentials that lead to gainful employment. Community college trustees – charged with governing these community colleges – have the final authority in policy and goal setting. Very little research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees, yet there are community college trustee standards created and promoted by national and state organizations (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). For example, the Association of Community College Trustees has commissioned guidebooks on effective trustee governance, the role of the board chair, the role of trustees in fundraising, best practices of board/president relations, and the trustee role in advocacy. In addition, state laws describe the legal responsibilities of community college trustees. Several authors, scholars, and practitioners have written various guidelines to help improve trustee governance (Carver, 1997; Chait, Ryan, & Taylor, 2005; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Polonio, 2005; Potter & Phelan, 2008). This section reviews existing scholarship on the community college mission, existing scholarship of community college trustees, and existing state law on community college trustees' roles and responsibilities. This literature review also contains the conceptional framework for this study, combining related research and my related experiences to form the theoretical and methodological basis for the development of this study.

Community Colleges

History. Community colleges can trace their roots as far back as the 1850s. During that time, several prominent educators – including University of Michigan President Henry Tappan, University of Georgia Trustee William Mitchell, and University of Minnesota President William Folwell – began calling for four-year universities to focus on junior- and senior-level instruction, as well as graduate education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). These higher education leaders viewed educating freshmen and sophomores as a burden (Jill, 2010). So, providing instruction to the freshmen and sophomores would be delegated to new institutions called junior colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Later in the same century, William Rainey Harper at the University of Chicago, David Starr Jordan of Stanford, and Edmund James of the University of Illinois, advocated for modifying the higher education system in the United States to reflect the European model, which held universities responsible for higher-order scholarship and lower, junior colleges focusing on vocational and technical training and education (Kintzer & Bryant, 1998; Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck, & Suppiger, 1994).

In 1901, Central High School in Joliet, IL, added fifth and sixth year courses to its high school curriculum (Jill, 2010). This was the beginning of the nation's first community college, Joliet Junior College (Milliron, de los Santos, & Browning, 2003). The establishment of Joliet Junior College began the creation of two-year junior colleges, technical institutes, and colleges focused on providing practical and technical training (Milliron et al., 2003). These early community colleges provided liberal arts education with the goal of their students transferring to four-year colleges and

universities to earn their baccalaureate degrees (Jill, 2010). It was quite common for the majority of community college students to be women preparing to be teachers (Jill, 2010). In 1922, the junior college offered the first two years of instruction toward a bachelor's degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). In 1925, the junior colleges began developing other curricula to meet changing civic, social, religious, and vocational needs of the communities the colleges served (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The enrollments in these early community colleges were low, generally 150 to 200 students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, junior colleges began to focus on job training to address widespread unemployment (Jill, 2010). This job training focus continued through the 1940s and 1950s. Following World War II, the United States faced a shortage of skilled workers. In 1944, the G.I. Bill of Rights was passed, which provided more educational opportunities to veterans (Jill, 2010). This Bill led to increased enrollments at junior colleges, as well as at four-year colleges and universities. In addition, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 strengthened school and college relations and encouraged academic flexibility through the GED testing program (Kintzer, 1996).

In 1947, The Truman Commission on Higher Education Report established junior colleges as genuine academic institutions (Kintzer, 1996). The Truman Commission on Higher Education reported that young people could benefit from formal education through grade 14, and that community colleges would have an important role in serving this purpose (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The functions of the community college would include academic transfer, vocational-technical education, continuing

education, developmental education, and community service (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). This network of public community colleges would combine the finest vocational and technical education with the more conventional junior college education (Kintzer, 1996). The objective was to open higher education for little or no tuition to a diverse group of students, including women and minorities, while serving the needs of the local communities (Baker, 1994; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Milliron et al., 2003).

Occupational education arose soon after the formation of the first community colleges, but did not become a major community college mission until the 1950s and 1960s (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). During the 1970s and 1980s, community colleges began to embrace a variety of entrepreneurial expansions, most significantly in workforce development (Jill, 2010). Joint ventures between community colleges and businesses and industries can be traced, in part, to the League for Innovation programs (Jill, 2010). In the 1960s, the League showcased key corporate partnerships formed by community colleges (Jill, 2010). In the 1980s the League, partnering with the Kansas City Regional Council for Higher Education and Johnson County Community College, hosted the We Mean Business: Policies for Partnerships in Industry and Education event (Jill, 2010). This launched major dialogue regarding the creation of systemic programs and services by community colleges to meet the needs of business and industry (Milliron, et al., 2003). This event served as the precursor for the development of the Business and Industry Services Network (BISNET), which developed a plan to explore workforce development as a major function of community colleges (Milliron, et al., 2003). By the end of the 1990s, workforce development units had become multi-mission

centers with large nonacademic staffs and large numbers of students enrolled in noncredit occupational programs (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006).

By the 1970s, the term "community college" became used for comprehensive publicly supported two-year colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Other names for community colleges include city colleges, county colleges, and branch campuses (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Some names even include the colleges' instructional emphasis, like technical institute and vocational, technical, and adult education centers (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Community colleges have been nicknamed the people's college, democracy's college, contradictory college, opportunity college, and anti-university college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

In the early 1990s, the League for Innovation in the Community College's BISNET leaders held a business and industry workshop and a conference on total quality management (Milliron et al., 2003). Soon after, BISNET formed the Community College Business and Industry Alliance, which brought together community college leaders and major corporations (Milliron et al., 2003). This alliance hosted a number of forums on industry and business training, and in 1994, hosted the first Workforce 2000 conference (Milliron et al., 2003).

In addition to the growth of joint ventures between community colleges and businesses, between the 1970s and 1990s, partnerships between community colleges and high schools strengthened. The mission of these partnerships was to groom students for technical and vocational two-year programs (Baker, 1994; Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

The comprehensive community college mission. Since their beginnings, community colleges attracted people who could not afford tuition at four-year colleges and universities, as well as people who couldn't attend college full-time, people whose ethnic backgrounds prevented them from going to four-year colleges and universities, people who were not properly prepared for college-level work, people who had to take time away from education, people who had become obsolete in their jobs and needed retraining, people who had never been trained to do a specific job, people who were unable to attend classes on a college campus due to imprisonment or a physical disability, and people who needed to fill their leisure time meaningfully (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). While community colleges are institutions of higher education that are "regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 5), they offer various programs and services to those who otherwise would not be able to obtain post-secondary education. Many community colleges have adopted a comprehensive mission that incorporates transfer, vocational, developmental, and continuing and community educational programs (Bragg, 2001a). This comprehensive mission came about when the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) encouraged community colleges to expand their missions from that of junior, transfer institutions to include vocational education as AACC sought a niche for the colleges (Morest, 2006).

One of the most prominent, fundamental parts of the community college mission is open access. Community colleges ensure open access to higher education for all who desire to learn (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). Community college scholars argue that open admission policies are a fundamental reason for the increasing enrollment of

diverse student groups in community colleges (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Because community colleges provide programs and services for all of the constituents in their communities regardless of racial, ethnic, economic, or academic circumstances, community colleges rarely exclude anyone from enrolling (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Community college students range from those seeking entrance to transfer programs to those having not yet completed high school and requiring the general equivalence degree (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Community college administrators believe that the open access part of the community college mission is the foundation on which all other community college operations rest (Shannon & Smith, 2006). The open door concept influences admissions and enrollment processes, curricular structures, faculty hiring, the relationships between community colleges and four-year institutions, advising and counseling activities, and colleges' responses to the needs of the K–12 sector, as well as those of the local economy (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Because so many community college students come from low-income or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, it is safe to say that without the open door, few of these students would be able to attend college (Shannon & Smith, 2006).

Parallel to the open door mission is the commitment to providing quality education at an affordable cost (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Although community college tuition and fees have increased over the years in response to economic conditions and state and local tax policies, the average price of attending a community college is lower than that of a four-year college, and has not increased at the same rate as tuition and fees at four-year institutions (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Without affordable tuition and fees, many community college students would not be able to afford to attend college

(Shannon & Smith, 2006). With their commitment to open access, community colleges have become open doors to higher education for many Americans. In today's economy, one of the key strategic resources for success is knowledge (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Shannon and Smith (2006) argue that community colleges must retain and strengthen their mission of inclusion in order to prepare knowledgeable citizens.

The comprehensive community college mission includes four parts: academic preparation for transfer to four-year colleges and universities, vocational education aimed to place students in careers immediately upon completing college, general education, and noncredit community outreach (Labaree, 1997). However, Bailey and Morest (2004) believe there are three dimensions to the community college mission. The first is the core, which focuses on remediation and degree-granting programs leading to academic or occupational associate degrees (Bailey & Morest, 2004). The second is the vertical, which involves relationships with high schools and four-year colleges, and focuses on traditional college-age students; it includes dual enrollment, technical preparation, transfer articulation with four-year institutions, the community college baccalaureate degree, and honors programs (Bailey & Morest, 2004). The third is the horizontal, which includes noncredit contract training, continuing education, small business development, general education, English as a Second Language, summer camps for children, and other community programs and services (Bailey & Morest, 2004). One of the growing roles of community colleges is within the vertical dimension. Dual enrollment programs, sometimes called college experience, allow high school students to simultaneously enroll in community college courses for credit (Gilroy, 2005).

Challenges to the comprehensive mission. The comprehensive community college mission allows community colleges – often called the people's colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008) – to be all things to all people in the communities they serve. Part of the community college mission is to provide transfer education for students to eventually attain a bachelor's degree. Part of the community college mission is to provide workforce development to meet the needs of businesses and industries. Part of the community college mission is to provide enrichment programs for community residents. Community colleges fulfill many roles within their communities by offering these varied programs and services with sometimes conflicting sets of intended outcomes (Bragg, 2001a). This conflict arises from limited amounts of money, time, and energy (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Serving one mission well may lead to cutting into the resources available for others (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Occupational education is expensive, and requires community colleges to subsidize higher-cost occupational programs with surpluses generated by less-expensive academic programs (Bailey & Morest, 2004).

Some believe that community colleges risk marginalizing their transfer programs when they expand vocational programs, including noncredit vocational programs such as contract and customized training (Morest, 2006). Some question if community colleges should concentrate more on providing high-quality academic and occupational training programs (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). In the 1980s, some proposed that community colleges should narrow their missions. Perhaps by eliminating some parts of the mission, community colleges could focus more on other parts of the mission. Some proposed elimination of the transfer function to concentrate on occupational education (Clowes & Levine, 1989). Some proposed elimination of occupational education to

focus on transfer education (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Dougherty and Townsend (2006) believe that elimination of parts of the community college mission will not happen. Community colleges gain too much from the comprehensive mission (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). The comprehensive mission gives community colleges the ability to serve various constituents, thus garnering widespread public and governmental support (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). It also protects community colleges from economic and political uncertainty (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). If one part of the mission loses favor, another part can compensate (Bailey & Morest, 2004).

Continued community college growth may also mean continually adding programs and services to meet new community needs. Community colleges attract more students whose parents did not attend college and are from middle and lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Morest, 2006). And with business, health, education, and technical programs like engineering increasing in popularity at four-year colleges and universities, community colleges have added transferrable vocational programs to their catalogs (Morest, 2006). Some of these new activities, like noncredit customized training, create a stronger relationship with the business sector (Dowd, 2003). On the other hand, by creating honors programs and transfer articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities, community colleges appeal more to traditional students and taxpayers (Dowd, 2003).

Some policy makers, employers, business leaders, educational administrators, and students are only interested in the efficient use of taxpayers' dollars and effective workforce development programs to meet the needs of the economy (Labaree, 1997). Some see community colleges as providers of high-tech jobs (Bragg, 2001b). Some

argue that community colleges should prepare individuals for high-tech jobs in computer technologies, teaching, and health care (Bragg, 2001b). Community colleges serve as the gatekeepers for the skilled jobs of the future and a primary source of advanced technical training (Bragg, 2001b). Others advocate a renewed focus on meeting the needs of low-income workers: inner-city residents, new immigrants, and those displaced from traditional middle-class jobs because their manufacturing plants have closed (Bragg, 2001b). This perspective views the community college as an institution that can lift such people out of poverty by providing both basic education and occupational training (Prince & Jenkins, 2005).

As the community college workforce development function has expanded and changed, there have been both good and bad repercussions for other parts of the colleges (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). On the plus side, expansion and transformation of the workforce development mission has fueled the expansion and diversification of the community college (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). It also brought in many students, particularly those from less-advantaged backgrounds, who might never have otherwise attended college (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Workforce development also generated new sources of revenue and helped create stronger connections with employers and state governments, which allowed community colleges to make up for diminished public funding (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). In addition, contract training programs have revitalized old-fashioned vocational programs by bringing in new information on what skills are needed in the workforce (Dougherty & Bakia, 2000). On the negative side, any time a part of an organization undergoes massive increases in activity, other parts may see their organizational prominence and access to resources decline (Jacobs &

Dougherty, 2006). This occurs at community colleges as workforce education programs grow in prominence (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Faculty and staff in traditional academic areas may become resentful of the attention workforce development attracts (Dougherty & Bakia, 2000). In addition, fewer academic standards are imposed on workforce training programs, which may reinforce perceptions that noncredit offerings are less rigorous than credit courses (Jacobs & Teahen, 1996). The growth of workforce development programs may also increase resistance from traditional academics because it is not aligned with the transfer function of the community college (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Even so, Jacobs and Dougherty (2006) believe that the workforce development function of the community college mission faces a crisis due to reduced corporate demand for customized training, diminishing state support, and the arrival of new workforce development providers into the marketplace.

The structure of the community college has evolved to fit the complexity of the external environment it serves (Alfred, Shults, Jaquette, & Strickland, 2009). This complexity is determined by the variety of missions the organization has and the number of different academic and administrative departments needed to fulfill this mission (Alfred et al., 2009). Complexity taxes the capacity of employees, as they shut down or conserve their energy for important needs that arise (Alfred et al., 2009). As a result, nothing is simple in today's community college (Alfred et al., 2009). If something appears to be simple, it is perceived as ineffective, and efforts are made to change it to fit the complex environment (Alfred et al., 2009). Confronting and working through complexity is a challenge community colleges face (Alfred et al., 2009). Complexity is both a cause and a symptom of problems, including communication, staff

disengagement, and low morale (Alfred et al., 2009). These harmful effects include pushing decision making down the organization, streamlining systems and processes, and binding staff to the collective pursuit of goals. (Alfred et al., 2009)

Many community college administrators believe that financial challenges threaten the open access mission (Shannon & Smith, 2006). One such financial threat to the open door mission is performance funding. By incorporating performance funding, performance budgeting, and outcomes assessment, state governments are directing colleges to act more like businesses (Dowd, 2003). Yet since their beginnings, community colleges have measured their success by the number of students they serve, not the number of students who earn degrees and certificates (Alfred et al., 2009). Many community college students enter the institution for short-term training that does not lead to a degree or certificate, and many others attend sporadically or part-time in order to support their families or raise children (Shannon & Smith, 2006). In addition to performance funding, citizens are not as willing as in the past to agree to tax increases (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Therefore, community colleges have had to raise tuition to continue to operate (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Shrinking state resources and increased tuition has placed a heavy burden on the very students community colleges were created to serve (Shannon & Smith, 2006).

Due to diminished public funding and the increased reliance of performance funding, community colleges require new thinking about student outcomes (Bailey & Morest, 2004). It would be helpful if there were greater acceptance of the importance of the comprehensive mission of community colleges, and the diversity of the students who enroll (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Community college students tend to be older, more

likely to be women and members of racial or ethnic groups, less likely to be attending full-time because they are working and taking care of family, and more likely to be the first person in their family to attend college (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Historically, the student populations of community colleges have been much more diverse than the populations of four-year colleges (Bailey & Morest, 2004).

Since the 1990s, few states have permitted community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). This mission expansion has been brought on by competition from for-profit institutions, such as the University of Phoenix, which now vie with community colleges by offering instant admissions and degrees online in many of the technical and occupational areas traditionally served by community colleges (Gilroy, 2005). The growing interest in community colleges offering bachelor's degrees is a source of mission conflict (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Some argue that the community college bachelor's degree conflicts with the transfer mission (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Also, it may lead to less emphasis on occupational training and developmental education (Bailey & Morest, 2004).

Community College Trustees

The boards of trustees have the final authority over the affairs of higher education institutions in the United States (Michael & Schwartz, 2000). Mellow and Heelan (2008) report that while very little research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees, there are community college trustee standards created and promoted by national and state organizations. Several authors, scholars, and practitioners have written various guidelines to help improve trustee governance (Carver, 1997; Chait, Ryan, & Taylor, 2005; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Polonio, 2005; Potter &

Phelan, 2008). In addition, practitioners and scholars have written about the establishment of college trustee boards in the United States, the roles trustees play on their boards, characteristics of board members, trustee selection processes, trustees' involvement in academic affairs, competencies boards of trustees should possess, and orientation and professional development programs that currently exist for community college boards of trustees members. Kezar and Eckel (2004) note that some scholarship on governance is theoretical rather than empirically based. The lack of empirical evidence to support explanations, descriptions, and theories of governance represents a weakness in its interpretive ability (Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

Kezar and Eckel (2004) conducted a review of all relevant scholarly literature that exists on higher education governance. They wrote that colleges and universities face greater competing priorities and demands to: engage the community, business, and industry; solve social problems and improve the schools; generate cutting edge research and innovations to fuel the economy; and develop a more just and equal society by preparing a diverse student body, while having fewer funds, more demands from students, and an increasingly complex legal environment (Kezar & Eckel, 2004). They identified three significant changes in the environment within the last decade that make governance even more problematic: (1) the need to respond to diverse environmental issues, such as accountability and competition; (2) weak mechanisms for faculty participation, major faculty retirement with close to half of the faculty retiring in the next 10 years, and a more diverse faculty entering the professoriate; and (3) the need to respond more efficiently based on shorter decision time frames (Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

One challenge that specifically impacts the role of the faculty in community college governance is the increased dependence on part-time faculty to provide instruction. Part-time faculty are only obligated to provide instruction during a given academic term (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). They typically are paid much less than full-time faculty, receive minimal benefits, and are not involved in the governance process (CCSE, 2014). As public funding to community colleges has declined, the portion of part-time faculty has grown at community colleges across the country as a way for community colleges to deliver instruction in the least expensive way possible (CCSE, 2014).

Trustee competencies. Today's college and university boards should possess certain competencies. Holland, Chait, and Taylor conducted in-depth interviews with 46 trustees at 10 liberal arts colleges throughout the country (1989). The authors determined several competencies that effective college and university trustee boards should possess. First, trustee boards should have an understanding of institutional context (Holland, Chait, & Taylor, 1989). In short, trustees' actions should be guided by the college's mission, and trustees should behave in a way that is consistent with the college's values (Holland et al., 1989). Second, trustees should build a capacity for learning (Holland et al., 1989). Trustees should learn from events and setbacks, and seek feedback on board performance (Holland et al., 1989). Third, trustees should work to nurture the development of the board as a whole, using effective communication to work together to develop goals, recognize achievements, and identify and develop leadership among members (Holland et al., 1989). Fourth, trustee boards should recognize complex and diverse constituencies as well as the impact board actions have on those

constituencies (Holland et al., 1989). Fifth, trustees should respect the governance process, including the roles and responsibilities of other college constituencies (Holland et al., 1989). Sixth, trustees should play a key role in shaping the direction of the college (Holland et al., 1989). Effective college boards of trustees anticipate problems and act before issues become critical (Holland et al., 1989). Effective college boards also take responsibility for their actions (Holland et al., 1989).

Trustee characteristics. Konrad (1977) conducted a survey of community college trustees in Canada to learn the backgrounds, education levels, and perceptions of board members. The survey was distributed to trustees in Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec. Konrad conducted the survey to determine if the stereotypical trustee, which he described as a highly-educated, older white male of the conservative political persuasion, was actually the generic make-up of community college boards in Canada. He found that most community college trustees were male, while 26 percent were female (Konrad, 1977). He also found that the typical Canadian community college trustee was in his or her 40's (Konrad, 1977). Seventy-seven percent of trustees lived in the same province as the community college for 12 years or more (Konrad, 1977). Fifty-six percent of respondents lived in the same city as the community college (Konrad, 1977). When it comes to education levels, 24 percent of trustees hold a doctorate, 22 percent hold a master's degree, 18 percent hold a bachelor's degree, 24 percent hold a high school diploma, and 13 percent attended, but did not complete high school (Konrad, 1977). Not many trustees have had previous experience serving on community college boards, as only 8 percent reported having previous experience as a member of a college or university board (Konrad, 1977).

Respondents ranked the characteristics believed to be the most important to being an effective community college trustee. The top five characteristics were: 1. Interest in higher education; 2. Vision to advance the community college; 3. Understanding of the role of the community college; 4. Having the time to devote to the community college board; and 5. Being involved with the community (Konrad, 1977).

Trustee orientation. Konrad (1977) suggested that since most community college trustees had no previous experience in higher education board settings, that community colleges should offer orientation sessions as well as professional development training for trustees. However, there is a lack of structured orientation training programs that exist for most community college boards of trustees throughout the United States (Davis, 1997). Only 14 percent of community college boards require new trustees to participate in structured orientation programs (Davis, 1997). Trustee orientation is voluntary at 70 percent of the boards (Davis, 1997). Sixteen percent of community college boards do not provide any formal orientation training to new board members (Davis, 1997). When boards do provide a formal orientation to new trustees, the college president and senior staff members conduct the workshops 86 percent of the time (Davis, 1997). Boards of trustees chairs run the orientation 47 percent of the time, and outside experts conduct the orientation 36 percent of the time (Davis, 1997). In addition, 25 percent of community college boards of trustees do not offer any continuing education or professional development programs for trustees whatsoever (Davis, 1997).

The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges found that where new college trustee board members receive some form of formal orientation, 85 percent are trained on college finances, and 69 percent review academic programs (Fain,

2009). The survey of nearly 700 public and private colleges found that these training sessions for new board members were brief (Fain, 2009). The most common trustee training session is less than half a day (Fain, 2009). Twenty percent of the respondents reported dedicating a full day to trustee orientation (Fain, 2009).

Trustee duties. To address how college trustees view the decision-making process and the roles trustees play on their boards, Rauh conducted a study of 5,200 college and university trustees throughout the United States (1969). Rauh found that trustees view decision-making as a top down process (1969). At the same time, Rauh suggested that trustees should abandon their managerial roles and strictly act in trust of the institutions they serve (1969). He outlined five duties trustees should focus on: select the president; evaluate administrators; hold the college's assets; act as the court of last resort; and maintain a balance between the college's constituents and promote the college to the larger external community it serves (Rauh, 1969). Rauh's ideas may serve to empower the college president, along with administrators, to manage the day-to-day operations of the college. In addition, the hands-off approach he suggests also may empower faculty to be responsible for academic affairs within colleges and universities.

The relationship the board has with its president is critical to effective trustee governance. The board empowers the president to oversee the community college. The president of the college must act as the leader with a clear covenant between the college and the community, and the president must be able to lead the college as both educator and community leader (Beehler, 1993). The constituency of the college is both local and statewide. The president is in the position of being the nexus between the forces within and outside the college (Beehler, 1993). The degree to which the college is successful

appears to be connected to the president's ability and performance (Beehler, 1993). Specifically, the president serves the following roles: college leader; college builder; advocate; personnel manager; money manager; marketer of programs and services; mentor to others in the college and the community; persuader of others in the college and the community; and establisher and interpreter of the college's mission (Beehler, 1993).

Community college boards of trustees have good working relationships with their presidents when there is a strong sense of trust between the president and the board (Potter & Phelan, 2008). In addition, the president treats board members equally, and has open and appropriate communication with all of the board members (Potter & Phelan, 2008). The president and board respect each other's right to make decisions, and the board never undermines the president's authority (Potter & Phelan, 2008). The board of trustees evaluates the president annually (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Finally, the board and president recognize that they are a team (Potter & Phelan, 2008).

When it comes to trustee involvement in academic affairs, Engel and Achola (1983) found – through a literature review – that trustees have the responsibility to ensure that faculty and staff are qualified to fulfill the educational goals of the institution. Trustees can provide general guidance on academic affairs, but should give faculty the authority to make academic decisions (Engel & Achola, 1983). Some trustee boards establish academic affairs committees to work hand-in-hand with faculty members on academic issues (Engel & Achola, 1983). Engel and Achola (1983) also reported that boards of trustees' decisions can be classified into the following categories: business and finance; physical plant; educational programs; personnel; external affairs; internal

affairs; ceremonial actions; student affairs; administrative organization; and other. Also, community college boards of trustees spend more of their time on business and finance, physical plant, and personnel matters than on academic affairs (Engel & Achola, 1983). In addition, most community college boards simply review and approve decisions already made elsewhere on campus (Engel & Achola, 1983). This reinforces that most community college trustees may be primarily concerned with carrying out their fiduciary roles as financial guardians of their colleges.

Trustee roles. Piland and Butte (1991) conducted a survey of 100 randomly selected trustees during the Association of Community College Trustees annual conference in September 1989. Trustees ranked five educational functions of the community college, in order of importance: 1. General education, 2. Occupational education, 3. Remedial education, 4. Transfer education, and 5. Adult education (Piland & Butte, 1991). Trustees strongly disapproved of placing greater emphasis on vocational training at the expense of general education (Piland & Butte, 1991). Trustee participants stated that money is the chief obstacle that prevents community colleges from reaching their goals (Piland & Butte, 1991). Participants also indicated that trustees should focus on policy formation, review of plans, making board authorizations, and evaluating the work of the college (Piland & Butte, 1991). In ranking their responsibilities in order of importance, trustees perceived establishing institutional policies as the top priority (Piland & Butte, 1991). At the time of the study over 20 years ago, the majority of respondents wanted academic counseling and assessment for students (Piland & Butte, 1991).

Michael and Schwartz (2000) conducted a study of Ohio college trustees to examine perceptions of their roles in the aggregate as well as to examine their perceptions sectorally. The study included 58 trustees from 15 community and technical colleges. The study reported that concern for the long range plan, support for the president, making institutional policy, attention to budget details, and developing new educational vision were the top five most important roles identified in the community/technical college sector (Michael & Schwartz, 2000).

Leadership of the trustee chair. Leadership studies in higher education tend to focus on presidents and administrators, while the leadership role of chairs of the boards of trustees had not been previously addressed until Donohue's study of trustee board chairs in 2003. Using in-depth open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written document analysis, Donohue studied community college board chairs in Illinois and found six tools used by effective board chairs: facilitation, communication, information, participation, expectation, and collaboration. For facilitation, each interviewee described his or her role as being a guide/mediator to resolve issues among the board, administration, or matters before the board (Donohue, 2003). Communication plays a role in relaying information so that other trustees understand the issues, are actively engaged, and appreciate others' expectations so that all are ready to work together as a single governing board (Donohue, 2003). Information is important as those who share it create an atmosphere of trust, while those who withhold it create an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion (Donohue, 2003). Trustee board chairs must do all they can to encourage participation from all members of the board. Chairs have to explore the expectations of other board members to learn the true rationale for positioning on

various issues (Donohue, 2003). The chair has to create an environment where other trustees can share their expectations freely without fear of negative criticism (Donohue, 2003). Ultimately, collaboration can be realized when the board chair facilitates board meetings using strong communication skills to provide necessary information while encouraging active participation within an environment where expectations can be expressed freely (Donohue, 2003). The findings of this study demonstrate how the chair of the community college board of trustees' most important role is to work with other trustees and the administration to lead the institution into the future (Donohue, 2003).

Previous community college educational experience. Vaughan and Weisman (1997) surveyed community college trustees and presidents and found that 51 percent of the trustees surveyed were once students at community colleges. Others do not have previous educational experiences with community colleges. Vaughan and Weisman (1997) found that 85 percent of community college trustees have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, and over 50 percent of community college trustees hold a graduate degree. In addition, 51 percent of community college trustees have attended a community college themselves (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997). Trustees who have attended community colleges appreciate the role the community colleges played in their educations, and those trustees want to give something back to community colleges (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997). Serving on a community college board fulfills that need (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997).

Personal interests vs. college interests. The ultimate responsibility for the operation, growth, and success of colleges and universities throughout the country is rested upon the men and women who volunteer to serve as trustees (Hendrickson, Lane,

Harris, & Dorman, 2013). Boards approve and execute the college's mission, interpret the college to the members of the community it serves, and create boundaries between and among internal and external constituencies (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Nationally, trustees serve as the guardians of the public trust who are responsible for ensuring that their colleges serve the purpose for which they were designed, that they fulfill their missions and serve the public good by creating an educated citizenry, contribute to the creation of knowledge, and preserve cultural heritages (Novak & Johnson, 2005). In short, college trustees serve as the bridge between higher education and society (Novak & Johnson, 2005).

However, community college trustees struggle with similar issues as their four-year counterparts, including: affordability, accountability, new program development, productivity, quality, diversity, technology, for-profit competition, and determining what is in the best interests of students (Polonio, 2005). The greatest challenge public college board members face is the political environment they operate in, which sometimes influences their appointment to the board (Hendrickson et al., 2013). This is also true at community colleges. Because community college trustees are community residents, they may become targets of other community members, special-interest groups, and others who try to influence the board's decisions (Polonio, 2005). Maintaining independence and impartiality is a challenge. One's decision to serve as a trustee carries with it the obligation that he or she will suspend individual self-interest in favor of what is best for the college as a whole (Hendrickson, 2013). Some people seek positions on the local community college board of trustees in order to represent a local legislator's interests, to position themselves for a future political career, or to find jobs and contracts for friends

and colleagues (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). Poorly intentioned board members can exert their influence in many ways, such as actions intended to limit funds to the college, curtailing curriculum, and awarding building contracts to politically connected construction companies (Mellow & Hellan, 2008). At the same time, there may be pressure for appointed trustees to align closely with the political ideology of those who appointed them (Mellow & Hellan, 2008).

Community college practitioners and scholars have coined the term "rogue trustee" to describe the very types of trustees who put their own self interests before the best interest of the community college. O'Banion (2009) interviewed 59 community college presidents from 16 states regarding the impact of the rogue trustee. The rogue trustee is a trustee who poisons the culture of the college by supporting policies that are not in the best interests of the institution (O'Banion, 2009). The top five behaviors of the rogue trustee are: attacking the president; making inappropriate contacts with community college faculty and staff; creating alliances with unions; attacking fellow trustees; and inappropriately influencing hiring and promotion decisions (O'Banion, 2009). Rogue trustees possess six motivations, including: exercising power; carrying out political obligations; behaving pathologically; representing the union's interests; carrying out personal agendas; and working against the president (O'Banion, 2009). Rogue trustees can constrain boards from functioning at an optimum level, and prevent boards from implementing a student success agenda. The best way to avoid rogue trustees from controlling the board agenda is to have a good training and orientation program in place for the board (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Trustee orientation and training

should cover board culture, board policies and practices, and ethical standards (Potter & Phelan, 2008).

Excellent boards maintain independence, openness, fairness, and their commitment to education (Polonio, 2005). Ideally, today's community college trustees are increasingly concerned with both the open door mission and student performance. The local community college board serves as the bridge between the college and the community, translating community needs for education into college policies while at the same time protecting the college from inappropriate external demands (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). In today's age of increased public pressure, diminishing public resources, and the student completion agenda, McClenney and Mathis (2011) offer the following 10 foundational steps to serve as a guide for community college trustees to make progress in transforming their colleges from access institutions to access to student success institutions:

1. Board members pay continuous attention to student success progress measures.
2. The focus on student success influences the development of policies, procedures, and practices.
3. The board of trustees empowers the president to ensure that there is broad and continuous faculty/staff/student/community engagement and collaboration supporting student success.
4. Allocation of resources is aligned with the vision, priorities, and strategies of improving student success.

5. The board of trustees adopts a culture of evidence to make decisions based on data.
6. The board has a sense of urgency to improve student success, recognizing that our nation's future depends on the educated citizenry community colleges provide.
7. The board's professional development programs are aligned with improving student success.
8. Student success is integrated into other initiatives, such as accreditation and strategic planning.
9. Trustees integrate an equity agenda to improve learning and completion outcomes of students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.
10. The board empowers the president to implement student success interventions that are based on effective best practices (McClenney & Mathis, 2011).

Board performance. Kezar's (2006) qualitative study to determine principles of high performance of public higher education describes how investors, governments, communities, and employees are scrutinizing board performance and challenging decisions. The United States is unique in that it does not have a central ministry that develops policy; instead, it developed lay governing boards that play policymaking and accountability roles (Kezar, 2006). Governance boards made up of trustees supervise higher education institutions for the public good and have similar responsibilities, such as hiring and evaluating the president, establishing and terminating programs, maintaining fiduciary responsibility, and ensuring the institution fulfills its mission

(Kezar, 2006). The challenges facing higher education require high-performing boards, ones that are prepared to address expanding access in a time of declining funds, increased regulatory requirements, global pressures, and an increasingly competitive environment (Kezar, 2006). The team of three researchers conducted phone interviews with 132 different experts on board performance. Based on the data collected in this study, there are six elements of effective or high-performing boards: leadership/board agenda, culture, education, external relations, relationships, and structure (Kezar, 2006).

The Policy Governance Theory addresses board performance. The theory encourages boards of trustees to develop policies and practices for: creating a consent and work agenda; performing board self-evaluations; governing board-foundation relationship; orienting new trustees; connecting with the community and evaluating impact; evaluating the president's performance; conducting effective political advocacy; developing a budget and financials; maintaining trustee ethical practices; and bargaining as a collective (Carver, 1997). Others have made specific suggestions to strengthen community college boards of trustees. For example, Mellow and Heelan (2008) recommend: creating clear guidelines for selection of individuals to a community college board of trustees based on skills and competencies; creating oversight mechanisms that diminish self-serving agendas of board members; establishing national guidelines for state sanctions of boards that do not adhere to minimum standards of professionalism; rewarding boards that exceed these standards of professionalism; implementing effective environmental scanning, assessment of inherent risks, and potential benefits in future projects, and focus board meetings on discussing strategic issues; and ensuring regular board orientation and evaluation.

Community college governance. College governance can be defined as "the process or art with which scholars, students, teachers, administrators, and trustees associated together in a college or university establish and carry out the rules and regulations that minimize conflict, facilitate their collaboration, and preserve essential individual freedom" (Corson, 1960, p. 12-13). Based on an analysis of governance in all 50 states, McLendon and Ness (2003) classified states as having one of three governance systems: the planning agency model, the statewide coordinating board model, and the consolidated governing board model. These models provide a continuum that ranges from maximum campus autonomy to maximum state control (McLendon & Ness, 2003). The planning agency model gives individual college campuses control over all academic and budget affairs with the central-state agency having very little to no authority (McLendon & Ness, 2003). The statewide coordinating board model recognizes that the state coordinating organization relies on persuasion of colleges to achieve statewide policy goals (McLendon & Ness, 2003). The consolidated governing board model gives the state coordinating body full oversight of and approval authority over colleges' programs and budgets, as well as coordination of activities between and among colleges (McLendon & Ness, 2003).

For community colleges specifically, governance models can be classified into four categories: the local community college governing or advisory board; the community college governing board or coordinating board at the state level; the higher education state governing board or coordinating board; and the university governing board (Polonio & Miller, 2012). The local community college governing or advisory board has authority with a single college or a multi-community college district (Polonio

& Miller, 2012). The community college governing or coordinating board at the state level has authority over community colleges with an entire state (Polonio & Miller, 2012). The higher education state governing or coordinating board has authority over all post-secondary institutions within a state, including community colleges, four-year colleges, and research universities (Polonio & Miller, 2012). The university governing board has authority over a university and some or all community colleges within a state or the university system (Polonio & Miller, 2012). Governing boards have governing authority of community colleges, and are responsible for creating policies and appointing a president or chancellor (Polonio & Miller, 2012). Coordinating boards establish statewide policies, guidelines, and plans for all community colleges throughout a state (Polonio & Miller, 2012). Advisory boards represent the community the college serves and provide a narrowly defined level of oversight to a community college (Polonio & Miller, 2012). One example of narrowly defined oversight is providing input into specific academic programs. For the state in which this study will be conducted, each community college is governed by a local community college governing board.

Internal community college governance. The notion of shared governance emerged in literature following the American Association of University Professors' "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities" adopted in 1966 (American Association of University Professors, 1966). The statement calls on internal stakeholders, including governing boards, administrators, faculty, and students, to cooperate and share the responsibility of acting as an academic institution (AAUP, 1966).

Most community colleges in the United States are governed by local boards (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Specifically, local community college governing boards exist in 36 states (Polonio & Miller, 2012). The board of trustees, elected locally or appointed by government officials, establishes policies for the colleges and is responsible for hiring the college president (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Vice presidents and/or deans manage academic affairs, business operations, distance education, student services, information technology, institutional advancement, institutional research, labor relations, and student services. The role of the faculty is significant in shared governance, as shared governance brings the various talents and experiences of the faculty to the decision-making table and provides continuity during administrative turnover (Gallos, 2009). Faculty senates are the most formal method for academic shared governance (Gallos, 2009). Faculty senates use the collective wisdom of the college community to address the work of the college (Gallos, 2009). The faculty and administration share responsibilities in shared governance, with faculty being an integral part of the operations of the institutions, over and above their teaching role (Kater & Levin, 2003). In their study, Kater and Levin found that community college faculty play roles in grievance proceedings, curriculum development, faculty evaluation processes, sabbatical recommendations, academic retrenchment, and developing the college's academic calendar (Kater & Levin, 2003).

Trustee role in governance. In an ideal environment, the community college trustee role in governance is to decide outcomes; plan for the future; monitor program and college measurement; act through adopting board policies; act as a whole board; delegate authority to the community college president; and make student learning and

student success the greatest priority (Carver, 1997). Only about 15 percent of community college boards have adopted the policy governance model (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Much of this has to do with the traditional role of the community college board of trustees, which was to be a watchdog for the public interest regarding the college's financial matters (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Traditionally, community college boards of trustees also approved all significant administrative decisions such as hiring and spending money (Potter & Phelan, 2008).

In most cases, trustees who were elected or appointed had previous experience as school board members and brought with them governance methods they used at the K-12 level (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Community college boards differ from school boards in that they establish policy for their institutions (Potter & Phelan, 2008). School boards typically approve spending requests (Potter & Phelan, 2008). The community college board is involved in deciding ends, meaning that the board determines desired outcomes, not the means to get there (Potter & Phelan, 2008). The board focuses primarily on the future, meaning it must devote time to establish vision and create a strategic plan to address what the college will look like in the future, and how instruction will be delivered (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Outcomes are measured by the college and monitored by the board, meaning that effective boards do not require that effectiveness measures only be used by the college (Potter & Phelan, 2008). These measures should be reported to the board in a timely manner (Potter & Phelan, 2008).

The community college board acts through policies, meaning effective trustee boards adopt policies that provide guidance and direction to the administration (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Policies set the priorities of the board and are strategic, and provide broad

direction for the administration, not detailed instructions on how employees should do their jobs (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Effective boards act only as a whole, meaning the majority decision of the full board should be supported by all members of the board to the extent their conscious will permit (Potter & Phelan, 2008). All authority delegated by the board is to the president (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Most community college boards of trustees pay attention to financial matters, but student success should be the highest priority (Potter & Phelan, 2008).

State law. The boards of trustees of community colleges in the state where this study took place organize annually in November to elect a chairman, vice chairman and other officers as the board determines (New Jersey Statutes Annotated, 1999). Within this state, community colleges operate under the premise of coordinated autonomy, which began with the Higher Education Restructuring Act of 1994. This state law abolished the State Board of Higher Education and the Department of Higher Education (New Jersey Council of County Colleges, 2010). For almost 30 years, the State Board and Department had broad regulatory authority over this state's colleges and universities. This law reduced the extent of state control over colleges and removed a level of bureaucratic review (NJCCC, 2010). The new system of higher education that took the place of the Board and Department gave increased autonomy, responsibility, and accountability to local community college trustees (NJCCC, 2010). For example, trustees now set tuition and fees, as well as approve programs to meet local needs. Local trustees also have the authority to set policies that govern their institutions (NJCCC, 2010).

State law 18a:64A requires that 11 people be members of a community college's board of trustees. This includes the county superintendent of schools, eight appointees selected by the local county governing body, and two appointees selected by the governor (N.J.S.A., 1999). The community college president serves as an ex officio member of the board of trustees without voting rights (N.J.S.A., 1999). Also, at least two members of the community college board of trustees must be women (N.J.S.A., 1999). In addition, the college's student body elects a representative from the graduating class to serve as a non-voting member (N.J.S.A., 1999). However, each community college board can vote to determine if the student-elected trustee can have voting privileges. In the two instances in this state where there are community colleges sponsored by more than one county, the boards of trustees are increased by two members for each additional county (N.J.S.A., 1999). All appointed members of the community college board of trustees had to have resided in the county for at least four years prior to their appointment (N.J.S.A., 1999). In addition, community college trustees are not permitted to hold elected public office (N.J.S.A., 1999). Terms of office of those appointed to the board of trustees last four years (N.J.S.A., 1999). Each trustee serves until his or her successor is appointed (N.J.S.A., 1999). Vacancies on the board of trustees are filled in the same way as the original appointment for the unexpired term (N.J.S.A., 1999). Trustees may be removed from their position for cause by the body that appointed them (N.J.S.A., 1999). Community college trustees serve on their boards without compensation, but are entitled to reimbursements for all reasonable and necessary expenses (N.J.S.A., 1999). In addition, voting members of the boards of trustees are not eligible to be employees of the community colleges where they have

served for two years following resignation or expiration of their trustee positions (N.J.S.A., 1999).

Under this state's local government ethics law, community college trustees are prohibited from having any direct or indirect financial interest in the community colleges that they serve (N.J.S.A., 1999). Trustees are not permitted to engage in any business, transactions, or professional activities that are in conflict with the proper discharge of their duties as trustees (N.J.S.A., 1999).

According to community college laws in the state in which this study will be conducted, community college boards of trustees are responsible for determining the educational curriculum of the college; appointing the college president; appointing college employees upon the nomination of the president; determining the qualifications, duties, compensation, and terms of office for college employees; setting tuition and fees for students; granting diplomas, certificates, and degrees; entering into contracts with other entities; accepting grants and contributions on behalf of the college; dispersing all funds appropriated to the college by the counties and the state; directing and controlling college expenditures; acquiring, owning, leasing, using, and operating property for college purposes; selling property that is no longer needed for the college; making rules and regulations consistent with general law for the proper administration of the college; exercising all other powers consistent with the rules and regulations necessary for the operation of the college; and establishing and maintaining a dedicated reserve fund for minor capitol needs, not to exceed 3 percent of the replacement value of the college's physical plant (N.J.S.A., 1999).

Within the state where this study will be conducted, each county has a board of school estimate made up of three freeholders and two community college trustees (NJCCC, 2010). This board determines the overall budget for its community college. The freeholder board then collects and appropriates the county share of funding to its local community college (NJCCC, 2010). In a community college established by one county, the board of school estimate is made up of the chairman of the board of chosen freeholders, two members of the board of chosen freeholders and two members of the board of trustees appointed by the freeholders (N.J.S.A., 1999). In the case of a community college established by more than one county, the board is made up of the chairman of the board of chosen freeholders from each participating county, one member of the board of chosen freeholders from each participating county, and one member of the board of trustees from each participating county (N.J.S.A., 1999).

By February 1 of each year, the community college board of trustees prepares and delivers an itemized statement of the amount of money estimated for the operation and capital outlay expenses for the college's ensuing year to the board of school estimate (N.J.S.A., 1999). The community college board of trustees then set a date, time, and location for a public hearing by the board of school estimate, sometime between February 1 and February 15 (N.J.S.A., 1999). During this hearing, taxpayers and others interested can present objections and be heard with respect to the itemized statements (N.J.S.A., 1999). The board of school estimate then fixes and determines the amount of money to be allocated by the county and certifies the amount signed by the majority of its members (N.J.S.A., 1999). Copies of this certified funding recommendation are then

delivered to the members of the community college board of trustees and the members of the local county governing body for action (N.J.S.A., 1999).

Trustee appointment process. Nationally, trustees are chosen to serve on their respective boards in three ways: appointment, election, and by virtue of position, such as a president or county superintendent serving as ex officio (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Community college trustees are elected in at least 20 states throughout the country, while in other states, community college trustees are appointed by state and local elected officials (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Within the state where this study will be conducted, there is an appointment process for community college trustees who are appointed by the local county governing body. The local county governing body establishes a community college trustee search committee of not less than five members who are county residents (N.J.S.A., 1999). The members of the committee are not permitted to be elected public officials and are not eligible for appointment to the board of trustees for a period of six months after serving on the trustee search committee (N.J.S.A., 1999). The trustee search committee nominates people for consideration by the local county governing body for appointment to the community college board of trustees (N.J.S.A., 1999). The local county governing body makes eight trustee appointments based on recommendations of the trustee search committee (New Jersey Council of County Colleges, 2001). In addition, the state's governor appoints two members to each community college board of trustees (N.J.S.A., 1999). The term of appointment as a trustee – from both the local county governing body and the governor – is four years. A search committee is not required for gubernatorial appointments to the board of trustees, but under state statute, boards of trustees may recommend individuals for appointment

to the board by the governor, with the final appointing authority resting with the governor (N.J.S.A, 1999). Finally, the county superintendent of schools serves on the community college board of trustees (N.J.S.A., 1999).

Trustee satisfaction. Active and supportive trustees can be a great asset to any college or university (Michael, Schwartz, & Hamilton, 1997). Trustees do not earn any money as members of their boards and are not expected to receive economic benefits from the colleges and universities that they serve (Michael, Schwartz, Cook, & Winston, 1999). Since being a community college trustee is not a paid job, many theories related to employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance may not be relevant in understanding trustee satisfaction (Michael et al., 1999). Trustees' level of motivation depends on their level of satisfaction with their various activities on their boards (Michael et al., 1999). Michael et al. surveyed 58 trustees from community and technical colleges as part of a larger study of trustees within Ohio. The researchers found that community college trustees in Ohio were most satisfied with their relationship between the board and the president, followed by the appointment of the college president, followed by the roles played by trustees, followed by the recognition of trustees, followed by the relationship between the trustees and the faculty, followed by the evaluation of the president's performance, followed by the relationship between the board and the state government, followed by the appointment of trustees (Michael et al., 1999). It is important to note that community college trustees in Ohio are elected by the voters, not appointed by government bodies (Michael et al., 1999). In Ohio, community college trustees provide a more direct supervision of college affairs compared to the

roles of trustees in public and private four-year colleges and universities (Michael et al., 1999).

Summary of Literature Findings

Upon reviewing the related literature, I have found that community college trustees will experience three general phenomena: preparation and development, responsibilities, and relationships. Figure 1 illustrates the three general phenomena and specific findings from the literature that make up these three groupings.

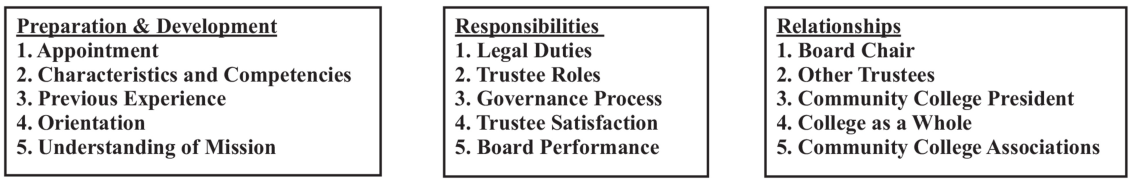

Figure 1. Phenomena Experienced by Community College Trustees.

Preparation and development. Preparation and development includes the manner in which the trustees joined their boards (appointment), the characteristics and competencies that are expected of trustees, whether or not trustees have previous experiences with community colleges, the level of orientation trustees receive when joining the board, and the understanding trustees have of the community college mission.

Nationally, trustees are chosen to serve on community college boards in three ways: appointment, election, and by virtue of position, such as a president or county superintendent serving as ex officio (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Within the state where this study will be conducted, there is an appointment process for community college trustees who are appointed by the local county governing body. In addition, within this state, the governor appoints two members to each community college board of trustees who serve four-year terms. The community college trustees that I interviewed were appointed to their positions via the county governing body or via the governor.

Community college trustees themselves ranked the characteristics believed to be the most important to being an effective community college trustee. The top five characteristics were:

1. Interest in higher education.
2. Vision to advance the community college.
3. Understanding of the role of the community college.
4. Having the time to devote to the community college board.
5. Being involved with the community (Konrad, 1977).

In addition to characteristics, effective community college trustee boards should possess the following competencies: an understanding of institutional context; a capacity

for learning; a desire to nurture the development of the board as a whole; the ability to recognize complex and diverse constituencies as well as the impact board actions have on those constituencies; respect for the governance process; and the ability to play a key role in shaping the direction of the college (Holland et al., 1989). In short, trustees' actions should be guided by the college's mission, trustees should learn from events and setbacks, seek feedback on board performance, use effective communication to work together to develop goals, respect the roles and responsibilities of other college constituencies in the governance process, anticipate problems and act before issues become critical, and take responsibility for their actions (Holland et al., 1989).

Some community college trustees were once students at community colleges (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997). Trustees who have attended community colleges appreciate the role the community colleges played in their educations, and those trustees want to give something back to community colleges (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997). Serving on a community college board fulfills that need (Vaughan & Weisman, 1997). Whether or not trustees have a previous educational experience at a community college is part of the preparation and continued development that community college trustees experience.

According to the literature, an understanding of the community college mission contributes to a trustee's preparation and continued development. Many community colleges have adopted a comprehensive mission that incorporates transfer, vocational, developmental, and continuing and community educational programs (Bragg, 2001a). One of the most prominent, fundamental parts of the community college mission is open access. Community colleges ensure open access to higher education for all who desire to

learn (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). Community college administrators believe that the open access part of the community college mission is the foundation on which all other community college operations rest (Shannon & Smith, 2006). The open door concept influences admissions and enrollment processes, curricular structures, faculty hiring, the relationships between community colleges and four-year institutions, advising and counseling activities, and colleges' responses to the needs of the K–12 sector, as well as those of the local economy (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Because so many community college students come from low-income or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, it is safe to say that without the open door, few of these students would be able to attend college (Shannon & Smith, 2006).

Responsibilities. The next concept that trustees experience is responsibilities. These responsibilities include duties that are commonly referred to in the literature and mandated by state law, the roles of trustees, the roles of trustees in the governance process, and the trustees' level of job satisfaction. In addition, trustees themselves contribute to the board's overall performance.

In general, community college trustees should carry out five duties as members of their boards: select the president; evaluate administrators; hold the college's assets; act as the court of last resort; and maintain a balance between the college's constituents and promote the college to the larger external community it serves (Rauh, 1969). However, in the state where this study will take place, state law clearly identifies the duties of community college trustees. According to community college laws in this state, community college boards of trustees are responsible for determining the educational curriculum of the college; appointing the college president; appointing college

employees upon the nomination of the president; determining the qualifications, duties, compensation, and terms of office for college employees; setting tuition and fees for students; granting diplomas, certificates, and degrees; entering into contracts with other entities; accepting grants and contributions on behalf of the college; dispersing all funds appropriated to the college by the counties and the state; directing and controlling college expenditures; acquiring, owning, leasing, using, and operating property for college purposes; selling property that is no longer needed for the college; making rules and regulations consistent with general law for the proper administration of the college; exercising all other powers consistent with the rules and regulations necessary for the operation of the college; and establishing and maintaining a dedicated reserve fund for minor capitol needs, not to exceed 3 percent of the replacement value of the college's physical plant (N.J.S.A., 1999).

Trustees play several important roles at their community colleges, but ideally they should focus on policy formation, review the long range plan, make board authorizations, evaluate the work of the college, support the president, pay close attention to budget details, and develop the educational vision of the college (Piland & Butte, 1991, Michael & Schwartz, 2000). Community college trustees execute these roles and carry out their responsibilities during their first year of service.

College governance is the process that brings together faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees at a college or university to establish and carry out the rules and regulations of the institution (Corson, 1960). Community college boards of trustees act through policies, meaning effective trustee boards adopt policies that provide guidance and direction to the administration (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Policies set the

priorities of the board and are strategic, and provide broad direction for the administration, not detailed instructions on how employees should do their jobs (Potter & Phelan, 2008). In an ideal environment, the community college trustee role in governance is to decide outcomes; plan for the future; monitor program and college measurement; act through adopting board policies; act as a whole board; delegate authority to the community college president; and make student learning and student success the greatest priority (Carver, 1997).

Active and supportive trustees can be a great asset to any college or university (Michael et al., 1997). Since being a community college trustee is not a paid job, many theories related to employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance may not be relevant in understanding trustee satisfaction (Michael et al., 1999). Trustees' level of motivation depends on their level of satisfaction with their various activities on their boards (Michael et al., 1999). Community college trustees were most satisfied with their relationship between the board and the president, followed by the appointment of the college president, followed by the roles played by trustees, followed by the recognition of trustees, followed by the relationship between the trustees and the faculty, followed by the evaluation of the president's performance, followed by the relationship between the board and the state government, followed by the appointment of trustees (Michael et al., 1999). I anticipate that satisfied trustees take their responsibilities seriously and carry them out to the best of their abilities.

Community college trustees contribute to the board's overall performance. Community college boards face challenges that include expanding access in a time of declining funds, increased regulatory requirements, global pressures, and an increasingly

competitive environment (Kezar, 2006). The Policy Governance Theory addresses board performance. The theory encourages boards of trustees to develop policies and practices for: creating a consent and work agenda; performing board self-evaluations; governing board-foundation relationship; orienting new trustees; connecting with the community and evaluating impact; evaluating the president's performance; conducting effective political advocacy; developing a budget and financials; maintaining trustee ethical practices; and bargaining as a collective (Carver, 1997). Excellent boards maintain independence, openness, fairness, and their commitment to education (Polonio, 2005).

Relationships. The third concept that trustees experience is relationships. Relationships include those that trustees have with the board chair and how he or she leads the board, the relationships trustees have with other trustees on the board, the relationships trustees have with their college presidents, the relationships trustees have with the institution as a whole, and the relationships trustees have with state and national community college associations.

Community college trustees will develop relationships with their board chairs. Trustee board chairs must do all they can to encourage participation from all members of the board. Chairs have to explore the expectations of other board members to learn the true rationale for positioning on various issues (Donohue, 2003). The chair has to create an environment where other trustees can share their expectations freely without fear of negative criticism (Donohue, 2003). Ultimately, collaboration can be realized when the board chair facilitates board meetings using strong communication skills to provide necessary information while encouraging active participation within an environment where expectations can be expressed freely (Donohue, 2003). The chair of the

community college board of trustees' most important role is to work with other trustees and the administration to lead the institution into the future (Donohue, 2003).

While the board chair's leadership is important, it is also important to consider the relationships trustees have with other trustees on their boards. For example, there may be members of the boards of trustees committed to carrying out their own personal agendas. The rogue trustee is a trustee who poisons the culture of the college by supporting policies that are not in the best interests of the institution (O'Banion, 2009). The top five behaviors of the rogue trustee are: attacking the president; making inappropriate contacts with community college faculty and staff; creating alliances with unions; attacking fellow trustees; and inappropriately influencing hiring and promotion decisions (O'Banion, 2009). Rogue trustees can constrain boards from functioning at an optimum level, and prevent boards from implementing a student success agenda.

Trustees will develop relationships with their presidents. The relationship the board has with its president is critical to effective trustee governance. The board empowers the president to oversee the community college. The president of the college must act the role of leader without a clear covenant between the college and the community, and the president must be able to lead the college as both educator and community leader (Beehler, 1993). The constituency of the college is both local and statewide. The president is in the position of being the nexus between the forces within and outside the college (Beehler, 1993). The degree to which the college is successful appears to be connected to the president's ability and performance (Beehler, 1993). Community college boards of trustees have good working relationships with their presidents when there is a strong sense of trust between the president and the board

(Potter & Phelan, 2008). In addition, the president treats board members equally, and has open and appropriate communication with all of the board members (Potter & Phelan, 2008). The president and board respect each other's right to make decisions, and the board never undermines the president's authority (Potter & Phelan, 2008). The board of trustees evaluates the president annually (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Finally, the board and president recognize that they are a team (Potter & Phelan, 2008).

Trustees will develop relationships with the college community as a whole. Trustees also may have relationships with external college constituents like the local appointing authority or the state's governor, as well as relationships with faculty and staff and students who attend the community college. Because community college trustees are community residents, they may become targets of other community members, special-interest groups, and others who try to influence the board's decisions (Polonio, 2005). Maintaining independence and impartiality is a challenge. Some trustees have been appointed to represent the interests of groups underserved in their colleges. When that happens, trustees focus on the needs of the few as opposed to the needs of the many (Polonio, 2005). Appointment from elected officials may lead trustees to believe that trustees get preferential treatment for contracts, or the appointment is a stepping stone to a political career (Polonio, 2005). In general, trustees can provide general guidance on academic affairs, but should give faculty the authority to make academic decisions (Engel & Achola, 1983). But ultimately, today's community college trustees should be concerned with students. Board members should pay continuous attention to student success progress measures and focus on student success when developing policies, procedures, and practices (McClenney & Mathis, 2011).

Trustees may develop relationships with both state and national community college associations. Oftentimes, state and national associations provide professional development and orientation for trustees, provide up-to-date information on both national and statewide community college policy, and offer networking opportunities with trustees from other community colleges. National and state community college associations also give trustees opportunities to serve community colleges at both the state and national levels. The associations can have a significant impact on the experiences of community college trustees. Minimally, trustees will become familiar with the notion that state and national community college associations exist for the purpose of providing professional development.

Conceptual Framework

I serve as a staff member for a community college state association in the Northeast region of the United States. The association itself is made up of the president of each community college and the board of trustees chair or his or her designee, making it a 38-member organization. In addition, the state association has created a trustee advocacy program called Trustee Ambassadors. These Trustee Ambassadors volunteer to meet regularly with state legislators and policymakers, as well as members of the federal congressional delegation, to discuss state and federal community college issues. The community college state association serves as the statewide voice of the community college sector, representing community colleges among state leaders, legislators, and policy makers. This state's community colleges operate in a fashion described as coordinated autonomy, where local boards of trustees govern their community colleges, but the trustees and presidents work collectively to address statewide higher educational

needs. The main focus of the state association is to advocate on behalf of the state's community colleges for adequate operating and capital support from the state, as well as to weigh in on legislation that affects community colleges, their employees, and their students.

Through my work at this state association, I have come to understand the dire need for community colleges to contribute to providing skilled workers for the country's workforce. Currently, the United States ranks 11th in the world in the percentage of people ages 25 to 34 who have earned a post-secondary credential (OECD, 2013), and the percentage of jobs that require postsecondary credentials will increase from 59 percent to 63 percent over the next decade (Carnevale et al., 2010). Community colleges are being called upon to produce more credentialed citizens to enter the workforce.

Nationally, 21.8 million students enrolled in colleges and universities in 2013 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Of these 21.8 million students, 1,132 community colleges enrolled 12.8 million students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). In Fall 2013, 61 percent of all undergraduate students who enrolled in this state's public colleges and universities enrolled at community colleges (New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education, 2014). Nationally and within this state where this study took place, community colleges are the largest providers of higher education.

Boards of trustees are the final authorities that govern these community colleges. Yet, very little research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). Therefore, I was interested in learning about the shared lived

experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service on their boards. This study attempted to answer this central research question: What are the meanings of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service? In addition, this study attempted to answer the following sub questions: How do community college trustees learn their responsibilities? What do trustees know about community colleges before joining their boards? How do trustees develop connections to their community colleges, their missions, and their students?

In order to better understand the lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service, I conducted a qualitative research study. Qualitative research explores and understands the meanings that individuals and groups assign to a problem (Creswell, 2014). Little research exists on the experiences of community college trustees. Therefore, qualitative research is the best approach since it is best used when little is known about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

Phenomenology is a qualitative method that does not contain explicit theoretical observation, since the researcher attempts to construct meaning from participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). The phenomenological researcher constructs rich, detailed descriptions of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In my study, I constructed descriptions of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service. I chose this method because as a researcher, I saw myself holding a constructivist worldview. Constructivists believe that there are multiple realities, and that those realities are socially and experientially based and specific in nature (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As a constructivist, I depended upon the rich descriptions of my research participants' various realities to understand the shared meanings of their lived

experiences. Since the epistemology of phenomenology focuses on revealing meaning rather than arguing a point or developing abstract theory, discovery of knowledge can be attained by sharing common meaning of mutual history, culture, and language of the world (Flood, 2010). I also chose phenomenology as my research method because of the nature of my research questions, which intended to help me develop an understanding of a shared lived human phenomenon.

Phenomenology provides a method for investigating the human behavior as legitimate subject matter (Osborn, 1994). It focuses on the analysis of conscious and immediate lived experience and is sensitive to the uniqueness of individuals (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology attempts to capture a person's lived experience and his or her assignment of meaning to that experience (van Manen, 1990). By engaging in phenomenology's inductive, open process of discovery, researchers avoid problems associated with hypothetical investigations designed to solicit preconceived findings (Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005). The emphasis of this study was on the meaning of shared human experience (van Manen, 1990), specifically, the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service. As a researcher, I borrowed other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences to develop an understanding of the deeper meaning of their experience (van Manen, 1990). People's experiences allow researchers to become more experienced themselves (van Manen, 1990).

As illustrated in Figure 2, I relied on community college trustees' rich descriptions of their lived experiences from their first year of service to determine the meaning of those experiences. The phenomenological method is structured as a

sequence of steps (Flood, 2010). The process I used began with a description of a lived experience by the participant to the researcher (Flood, 2010). I then reviewed all written transcripts of interviews, setting aside all prior thought, conceptions, or judgment I may have had in order to be completely open to the description (Flood, 2010). This is also known as bracketing (van Manen, 2014).

Next, I used reduction to gain access to the pre-reflective experiences from my participants in order to find meanings (van Manen, 2014). Reduction involved reducing the world as it is considered in the natural attitude to a world of pure phenomena (Dowling, 2007). During reduction, I reviewed the data in order to reveal essential themes and determine essential phrases (van Manen, 1990). To accomplish this, I wrote anecdotes derived from the interview transcriptions of lived experience descriptions. An anecdote is short and simple story that describes a single event, and creates the experience of presence, closeness, and proximity in place and time (van Manen, 2014). Writing anecdotes is the primary tool phenomenological researchers use to discover themes. I then used these anecdotes with my participants to allow them to reflect in a concrete way on experiences, and confirm the themes I had discovered (van Manen, 2014).

Next, I determined the inter-relatedness of the themes and how they reflect the essence of the phenomenon (Lanigan, 1988). I sorted the themes into clusters, which were then sorted into higher order clusters (Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005). I determined the statements and phrases that were essential about the phenomenon being described (van Manen, 1990). The final structure was synthesized into descriptions that captured the meaning of the phenomenon (Osborne, 1994).

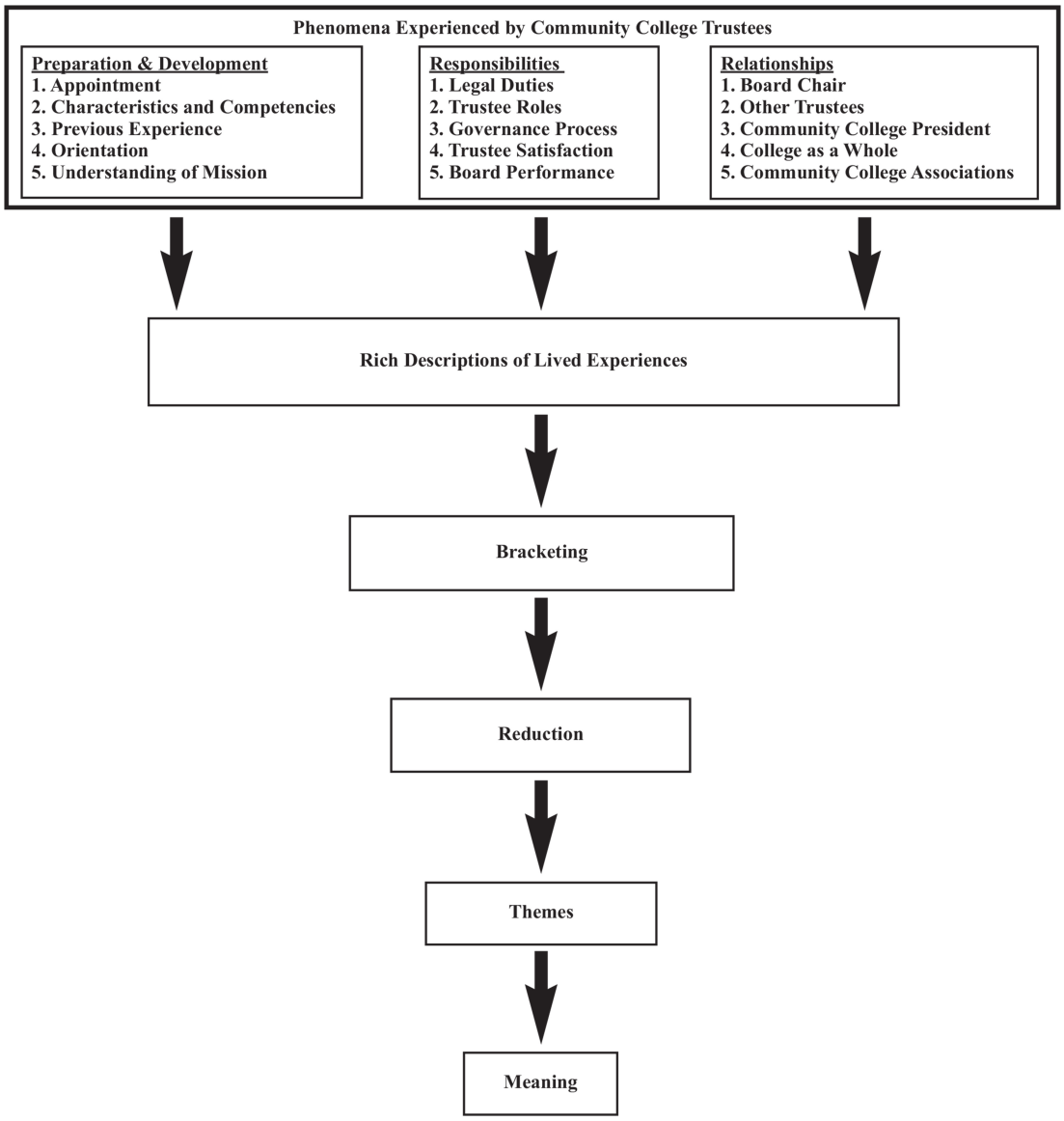

Figure 2. Understanding the Meaning of Shared Experiences of Community College Trustees in Their First Year of Service.

Summary

The traditional role of the community college board of trustees was to be a watchdog for the public interest regarding the college's financial matters (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Traditionally, community college boards of trustees also approve all significant administrative decisions such as hiring and spending money (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Also, community college boards of trustees spend more of their time on business and finance, physical plant, and personnel matters than on academic affairs (Engel & Achola, 1983). Many of the major studies of trusteeship are dated, suggesting little current scholarly activity on this subject (Michael & Schwartz, 2000). Much of the more current materials are prescriptive opinion pronouncements, suggesting what trustees ought to be doing (Michael & Schwartz, 2000). Most of these recent materials are contained in trade journals for trustee associations (Michael & Schwartz 2000). Mellow and Heelan (2008) and Kezar and Eckel (2004) also claim that very little scholarly research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees. It was my goal that this project would result in obtaining a better understanding of the meaning of the experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service and contributes to both the scholarly community and the professional practice of community college trustee governance.

Chapter 3

Methodology

To conduct this qualitative study of community college trustees at a community college in a state in the Northeast region of the United States, I employed phenomenological research. This chapter discusses the rationale of the research approach, the setting and sampling, the data collection and analysis methods, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations and delimitations.

Rationale for Research Approach

In order to better understand the lived experiences of community college trustees in their first year of service, I conducted a qualitative research study. Qualitative research explores and understands the meanings that individuals and groups assign to a problem (Creswell, 2014). Boards of trustees govern community colleges. The boards of trustees have the final authority over the affairs of higher education institutions in the United States (Michael & Schwartz, 2000). Very little research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees, yet there are community college trustee standards created and promoted by national and state organizations (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). Several authors, scholars, and practitioners have written various guidelines to help improve trustee governance (Carver, 1997; Chait, Ryan, & Taylor, 2005; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Polonio, 2005; Potter & Phelan, 2008). In addition, practitioners and scholars have written about the establishment of college trustee boards in the United States, the roles trustees play on their boards, characteristics of board members, trustee selection processes, trustees' involvement in academic affairs, competencies boards of

trustees should possess, and orientation and professional development programs that currently exist for community college boards of trustees members.

This research study focused on the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service. My goal was to understand the meaning of community college trustees' experiences in their first year of service to their board. I have also developed a better understanding as to how community college trustees learn their responsibilities, what trustees know about community colleges before joining their boards, and how trustees develop connections to their colleges, their missions, and the students they serve. Little research exists on the experiences of community college trustees. Therefore, qualitative research was the best approach since it is best used when little is known about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

Phenomenology is a qualitative method that does not contain explicit theoretical observation, since the researcher attempts to construct meaning from participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). The phenomenological researcher constructs rich, detailed descriptions of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In my study, I worked to construct a description of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service. I chose this method because as a researcher, I saw myself holding a constructivist worldview. Constructivists believe that there are multiple realities, and that those realities are socially and experientially based and specific in nature (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I also chose this method because of the nature of my research questions, which intended to help me develop an understanding of a shared lived human phenomenon.

Phenomenology provides a method for investigating the human behavior as legitimate subject matter (Osborn, 1994). It focuses on the analysis of conscious and immediate lived experience and is sensitive to the uniqueness of individuals (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology attempts to capture a person's lived experience and his or her assignment of meaning to that experience (van Manen, 1990). By engaging in phenomenology's inductive, open process of discovery, researchers avoid problems associated with hypothetical investigations designed to solicit preconceived findings (Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005).

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer this central research question: What are the meanings of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service? In addition, this study attempted to answer the following sub questions: How do community college trustees learn their responsibilities? What do trustees know about community colleges before joining their boards? How do trustees develop connections to their community colleges, their missions, and their students?

Setting and Sampling

The setting of this research study was four community colleges within a state in the Northeast part of the United States. Since qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people from the defined population (Miles & Huberman, 1994), one trustee who has completed his or her first year of service from each of the four community colleges served as research participants. These participants provided rich descriptions of their experiences about their first year of service on their boards. In order to identify participants for this study, I searched attendance records of statewide

community college events hosted by this state's community college state association. Seven possible participants who had completed their first-year of service within the past four years were identified. Once the seven were identified, I narrowed the sample to four possible participants, with three to serve as back-ups in case any of the initial four were unable to participate. I contacted the presidents at the four community colleges where these trustees serve, and received approval from them to ask the selected trustees to participate. Three of the initial four trustees agreed to participate, while one was unable to commit the time necessary for the study. I then consulted the list of three back-up participants, and contacted the president with the first trustee on the list to seek permission to approach the trustee to serve as a participant. With the president's approval, I contacted the fourth trustee, and he agreed to participate. This sampling technique is known as purposeful sampling, as all of the participants had stories to tell about their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Researchers intentionally select individuals using purposeful sampling to gain a better understanding of a central phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, this sample can also be considered a criterion sample, as the participants in the study represent people who have experienced the phenomenon I am researching (Creswell, 2013).

In order to carry out this study, I obtained Institutional Review Board approval from Rowan University. I also obtained written approvals from the appropriate institutional official(s) at the community colleges with the authority to approve research at their institutions.

Data Collection Methods

I used phenomenology to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' lives (van Manen, 1990) as they relate to their first year of service as trustees at a community college. These lived experience descriptions served as data (van Manen, 1990). It is important to note, however, that the accounts of lived experiences are not the same as the lived experiences themselves (van Manen, 1990). Recollections of lived experiences in any form, including reflections, descriptions, recorded interviews, and transcribed conversations, will be different than the actual lived experiences of the participant researchers (van Manen, 1990). So as a researcher, I did my very best to encourage participants to answer questions as they lived the experiences, not reflect on why they acted the ways they did during the experiences. I constructed my interview questions in a way that asked respondents to provide their recollections of their lived experiences, without reflecting on why they acted the ways they did during their experiences.

In his experience, van Manen (1990) found that people talk about their experiences with much more ease and eloquence and with much less reserve compared to writing about their experiences on paper. Face-to-face interviews allow participants to be more involved in the research process (van Manen, 1990). The use of open-ended, in-depth interviews is an effective means of gathering descriptions (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological interviewing focuses on understanding a personal life story and the meaning the co-researcher attaches to the experience (van Manen, 1990). In phenomenology, the participants are considered co-researchers, as the researcher and co-researchers work collaboratively to discover meanings (Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005). Participants as co-researchers should be in communication with the researcher at

each phase of inquiry, and researchers should suspend personal judgment or beliefs during the entire process of phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 1990).

The face-to-face interviews provided me as the researcher an effective means of gathering descriptions of human experiences. The goal in the interview was to have the researcher make the participants as comfortable as possible in describing their experiences as they lived them, and avoid generalizations and interpretations (van Manen, 1990). Interviewing to obtain personal life stories serves two specific purposes. First, the narrative is a resource for developing deeper understanding of a human lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Second, the interview serves as a vehicle to develop a relationship with the participant that leads to a better understanding of the meaning of the participant's experience (van Manen, 1990). In addition, interviewing allows a researcher to explore the experiences of participants as well as the meanings participants make from those experiences (Seidman, 2006).

For this phenomenological study, I conducted three interviews with each of the four research participants. The three interview approach allows the researcher to establish a context of the participants' experience, allows participants to construct details of their experiences, and allows participants to reflect on the meanings of those experiences (Seidman, 2006). The first interview allowed each participant to the put their experiences into context by reconstructing the events in their pasts that place their role as a trustee in the context of their lives (Seidman, 2006). The second interview allowed participants to recreate concrete details of their lived experiences (Seidman, 2006). The third interview served as an opportunity for participants to reflect on the

meaning of those experiences (Seidman, 2006). All interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed into text.

Data Analysis Methods

As previously mentioned, all lived experience descriptions served as data (van Manen, 1990). The data for this study came from interview transcriptions. To begin the data analysis phase, I referred to my research questions, prior to reading the interview transcriptions. Referring to the research questions helped me as a researcher determine what was important to code and what was to be omitted (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

The next step in data analysis is called the epoché, also known as bracketing (van Manen, 2014). Bracketing is the act of suspending the natural attitude or taken-for-granted beliefs and attitudes while reading the interview transcripts (van Manen, 2014). As a researcher, I put into brackets the various assumptions that might have stood in the way of discovering the meaning of a phenomenon (van Manen, 2014). Bracketing provides the means to cancel the natural attitude, leading the researcher back to the origins of phenomena, which are generally lost in everyday thought (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Through bracketing, phenomenological researchers grasp the essence of the phenomenon (Bradbury-Jones, Irvine, & Sambrook, 2010). The essence of the phenomenon can be grasped by adding or subtracting different structures and exploring whether the invariant or essential structure remains (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010).

Once I bracketed my previous experiences, knowledge, and predispositions, I began the reduction. Reduction allows the phenomenological researcher to gain access to the world of pre-reflective experience in order to find meanings (van Manen, 2014). Reduction involves reducing the world as it is considered in the natural attitude to a

world of pure phenomena (Dowling, 2007). During reduction, researchers review data in order to reveal essential themes and thereby determine essential or revealing phrases (van Manen, 1990) that are essential to the participants' lived experiences (Lanigan, 1979).

Next, van Manen (2014) recommends using the revocative method of writing to truly discover the participants' experiences. During the revocative method, phenomenological researchers write anecdotes, derived from the interview transcriptions of lived experience descriptions, to create the experience of presence, closeness, and proximity in place and time (van Manen, 2014). The anecdote is the most common device by which people talk about their events (van Manen, 2104). Anecdotes allow people to reflect in a concrete way on experiences, as the anecdote recreates experiences, not reasons for the experiences (van Manen, 2014). In phenomenology, the researcher constructs anecdotes from lived experience descriptions (van Manen, 2014). An anecdote itself is a short and simple story that describes a single event (van Manen, 2014). It begins close to the central moment of the experience and includes important concrete details (van Manen, 2014). An anecdote contains several quotes that indicate what was said, and what was done during the experience (van Manen, 2014). The anecdote itself will finish quickly after the climax, and includes an effective last line to make a point (van Manen, 2014).

As a phenomenological researcher, I constructed anecdotes in order to create the essence of the meaning of the participants' lived experiences. After I collected stories from the research participants in the second interview, I interpreted what the significant themes were that emerged from the stories as I read against my primary research

question (van Manen, 2014). I then edited the narratives into anecdotes by deleting redundant material and retaining theme-relevant material (van Manen, 2014).

After creating anecdotes, I reconnected with my participants to ensure iconic validity (van Manen, 2014). I asked additional questions so that both the interviewer and interviewees could interpret the significance of the themes discovered (van Manen, 1990). By asking, "Is this what your experience was really like?" (van Manen, 1990, p. 99), I worked with my interviewees to collectively assess the significance of the themes, and therefore generate understanding (van Manen, 1990). The goal of this activity was to ensure a high level of accuracy and censuses (Cho & Trent, 2006). This activity, known as member check, also ensured credibility, as participant feedback is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Upon completing the member check, the next step in data analysis was to analyze the themes discovered in order to clarify and make explicit the structure of the lived experiences of my research participants (van Manen, 1990). I created a detailed representation of the experiences as lived (van Manen, 1990). The meaning of the phenomenon is not simply discovered, nor is it one-dimensional (van Manen, 1990). Meaning is multi-dimensional, and by using phenomenology, a researcher reflectively analyzes the structural and thematic aspects of interview texts and other artifacts (van Manen, 1990). Making meaning from the text of a lived experience is more a process of discovery, where generating understanding is not bound by rules but instead a process of seeing meaning (van Manen, 1990). These themes give phenomenologists control and order in the research and writing processes (van Manen, 1990). Why work to discover themes? This motivation comes from the desire to make sense of things (van Manen,

1990). “Desire is not just a psychological state; it is a state of being” (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). Human beings have desire, the deep interest in making sense of various aspects of life (van Manen, 1990).

Themes are experiences of focus and meaning (van Manen, 1990). Theme formation itself is simple, yet they are intransitive (van Manen, 1990). Themes are forms of capturing the phenomenon the researcher is trying to understand (van Manen, 1990). Themes are needed to make sense of things (van Manen, 1990). Themes open researchers to fuller notions of lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). Themes get at the notion, they give shape to abstract feelings and experiences, describe the content of the notion, yet are always the reduction of the notion (van Manen, 1990). No single theme can completely explain the deeper meaning of an experience (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological themes are often understood as structures of experience (van Manen, 1990). Therefore, phenomenologists attempt to determine the experiential structures that make up those experiences (van Manen, 1990).

I then determined the inter-relatedness of the themes and how they reflected the essence of the phenomenon (Lanigan, 1988). I identified all the themes in the protocol for each participant then sorted them into thematic clusters, which were then sorted into higher order clusters (Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005). It was important to ask, during this phase of the data analysis, what statements or phrases seemed particularly essential about the phenomenon being described (van Manen, 1990)? This stage of data analysis constitutes a within persons analysis (Osborne, 1990). The researcher interrogates the natural units and the central themes that have emerged (Giorgi, 1975). Questions that are central to the research should be put to the data in an ordered and systematic manner

(Giorgi, 1975). I generated final themes from this questioning. Once the themes were generated, I wrote descriptive statements of the essential, non-redundant themes by describing them in relation to the specifics of the research situation (Giorgi, 1975). The final structure was synthesized into a description that captures the meaning of the phenomenon (Osborne, 1994).

Issues of Trustworthiness

I aimed to ensure that my data collection was valid. Through the data collection processes, I worked hand in hand with my participants to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon. In phenomenology, the researcher relies on his or her participants to develop a dialog and thus validate the phenomenon as described (van Manen, 1990). Validity in qualitative research is when the researcher is observing, identifying, or measuring what he or she purports (Toma, 2006). Credibility is established when research participants "agree with the constructions and interpretations of the researcher" (Toma, 2006, p. 413). In other words, my research is credible because I described my participants' lived experiences to them and my participants resonated with those descriptions (Toma, 2006). In order to ensure that my research was trustworthy, my findings relate to the authentic reality I came to understand from my research participants (Toma, 2006). My findings also related to how my participants constructed their experiences in such a way that readers of this work will be confident in the conclusions, implications, and recommendations my data collection generated (Toma, 2006).

Transactional validity in qualitative research is an interactive process among the researcher, the participants, and the data collected (Cho & Trent, 2006). The goal was to

achieve a high level of accuracy and censuses (Cho & Trent, 2006). To ensure validity in my findings, I employed participant feedback in the form of member check in which I asked my participants to review and confirm my findings once I analyzed the data (Long & Johnson, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that participant feedback is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility because it provides the opportunity to assess what respondents intended. Participant feedback also gives respondents the opportunity to correct and challenge perceived misinterpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participant feedback allows respondents to provide additional information, and at the same time makes it more difficult for respondents to claim that they have been misunderstood (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participant feedback also provides an opportunity for respondents to summarize and to assess and confirm overall adequacy of individual data points (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Using member checks helped me as a researcher to validate themes (Corben, 1999). I also used member checks to test categories, interpretations, and conclusions I derived from the data collected from participants (Dunne, Sullivan, & Kemohan, 2005). Member checks encourage negotiation of meanings between the researcher and the research participants, and analysis involves the merging of the researcher's and participants' perspectives (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010).

The act of member check can be described as joint exploration (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010). Joint exploration in the form of member check provides phenomenologists the opportunity to check their interpretations of the research participants' experiences of the phenomena (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010). Member checks are objects of reflection in follow-up conversations with participants (van Manen, 1990). The interviewer and

interviewee can interpret the significance of the initial themes in light of the original phenomenological questions (van Manen, 1990).) Member checks in phenomenology can enhance the trustworthiness of a study, and should be standard practice in phenomenological studies (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010).

Limitations and Delimitations

I believe that my previous experiences as a community college practitioner and as a doctoral student served me well as an interviewer while conducting this study. In addition, my role within the state association gave me access to community college boards so that I could conduct interviews with four trustees from different community colleges. However, since I do have experience in working with some trustees at these community colleges in the past, I needed to be mindful of existing biases and perceptions I already have when it comes to members of the boards of trustees. For example, I anticipated that participants would be familiar with the open access comprehensive mission of community colleges. I also anticipated that participants would be aware of their duties as provided in state law. These biases came from my own personal experiences where I had come to know very well the importance of the open access comprehensive community college mission, and the duties of community college trustees as described in state law.

Qualitative research is best used when little is known about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). In a qualitative research project, the researcher attempts to describe a research problem that can best be understood by studying a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In phenomenology in particular, it is important that the research participants have actually experienced the phenomenon in question so that the researcher can develop a

common understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). As a researcher using qualitative research, my aim was to develop an understanding of my participants' lived experiences, as opposed to using a quantitative method where researchers try to develop a measured dimension of a phenomenon (Hathaway, 1995). It is important that as a researcher, I maintained my objectivity in order to prevent bias from influencing the research process (Riehl, 2001). Other limitations of this research include: limited objectivity, confounded meaning when interpreting results, lack of generalizability, and the potential for subject bias in question responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Phenomenology itself is not without its problems. Experiences described during an interview represent particular moments in time, and revisiting previous experiences can be distressing and unwanted (Lillibridge, Cox, & Cross, 2002). Participants may forget or regret what they said during an experience or feel compelled to agree with the researcher (Sandelowski, 2002). If participants disagree with aspects of an interpretation, the validity of the findings can be compromised (Ashworth, 1993).

Summary

Both Mellow and Heelan (2008) and Kezar and Eckel (2004) claim that very little scholarly research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees. My research study attempted to understand the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service on their boards. This study attempted to answer this central research question: What are the meanings of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service? In addition, this study attempted to answer the following sub questions: How do community college trustees learn their responsibilities? What do trustees know about community colleges

before joining their boards? How do trustees develop connections to their community colleges, their missions, and their students?

The emphasis of this study, as well as all phenomenological studies, was on the meaning of shared human experience (van Manen, 1990). The point is to borrow other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences to develop an understanding of the deeper meaning of an aspect of human experience (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenologists do this because other people's experiences allow researchers to become more experienced themselves (van Manen, 1990).

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This phenomenological study presents findings intended to understand the shared lived experiences of community college trustees in their first year of service on their boards. In phenomenology, the researcher attempts to construct meaning from participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenology strives to identify the uniqueness of experiences as people live through them (van Manen, 2014). Using this methodology, researchers rely on other people's experiences so that they may become more experienced themselves (van Manen, 1990).

My dissertation committee encouraged me to identify potential participants for this study who had recently completed their first year of service as a community college trustee. Members of my dissertation committee were concerned that interviewing trustees who had served for an extensive amount of time may find it difficult to recall their first-year experiences on their community college boards of trustees. With the guidance of my dissertation committee chairman, I identified possible participants for the study by searching attendance records of statewide community college events hosted by this state's community college state association. Seven possible participants who had completed their first-year of service within the past four years were identified. Once the seven were identified, I narrowed the sample to four possible participants, with three to serve as back-ups in case any of the initial four were unable to participate. I contacted the presidents at the four community colleges where these trustees serve, and received approval from them to ask the selected trustees to participate. Three of the initial four trustees agreed to participate. I then consulted the list of three back-up participants, and

contacted the president with the first trustee on the list to seek permission to approach the trustee to serve as a participant. With the president's approval, I contacted the fourth trustee, and he agreed to participate.

I conducted a series of three in-depth, open-ended interviews with the four participants. The first interview allowed me to develop a rapport with each participant and learn his or her background prior to becoming a community college trustee. In the second interview, participants recreated details of their lived experiences during their first year of service on their boards. Following the second interview, I analyzed the data collected from the four participants in the first two interviews in order to develop preliminary themes that I could share with my participants in the third interview. Over a period of two weeks, I conducted the first set of interviews with each participant. After two weeks of transcribing those initial interviews, I conducted the second round of interviews with each participant. Following the completion of the second round of interviews (which took two weeks), I spent three months transcribing the second round of interviews, analyzing the data, writing anecdotes, and identifying preliminary themes.

To begin the data analysis phase, I referred to my research questions, prior to reading the interview transcriptions. Referring to the research questions helped me as a researcher determine what was important to code and what I could omit (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Next, I conducted bracketing (van Manen, 2014), where I put into brackets the various assumptions that might have stood in the way of discovering the meaning of a phenomenon (van Manen, 2014). For example, I took into consideration my previous experiences working with community college trustees in my professional role and did my best to not let those experiences influence my interpretations of the

interview transcripts. I then reduced the data in order to reveal essential themes and revealing phrases (van Manen, 1990) that I thought were essential to the participants' lived experiences (Lanigan, 1979).

I then employed the revocative method (van Manen, 2014) to create anecdotes, which were derived from the interview transcriptions of lived experience descriptions to create the experience of presence, closeness, and proximity in place and time (van Manen, 2014). The anecdote is the most common device by which people talk about their events (van Manen, 2104). Anecdotes allow people to reflect in a concrete way on experiences, as the anecdote recreates experiences, not reasons for the experiences (van Manen, 2014). As described in Chapter II, in phenomenology the researcher constructs anecdotes from lived experience descriptions (van Manen, 2014). The anecdotes I constructed were short, simple stories that described single events (van Manen, 2014). These anecdotes finished quickly after the climax, and included an effective last line to make points (van Manen, 2014). After creating anecdotes, I then analyzed the anecdotes and grouped them into thematic clusters (Cornett-DeVito & Worley, 2005). Once the themes were generated, I wrote descriptive statements of the essential, non-redundant themes by describing them in relation to the specifics of the research situation (Giorgi, 1975).

During the third interview with each research participant, I shared my initial findings in order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, as well as develop the meaning of the research participants' experiences. After the third interviews were completed, I undertook the process of using the anecdotes and input from the final round of participant interviews to finalize the major themes of the study. It is important to note

that there is no one way of doing this. As van Manen points out, "the research is the writing" (van Manen, 2014, p. 389). I took it upon myself as a researcher to create themes that make the reader see something specific (van Manen, 2104). For example, the participating trustees all shared stories of how they were moved personally to become more engaged with the work of their boards after attending events that showcased student accomplishment. This theme became clear after reviewing the anecdotes I wrote from each of the participants' interviews, as well as sharing this as a preliminary finding with my research participants during the third and final interview. The anecdotes themselves are used here to illustrate each theme, and help the reader become touched, taken, and overcome by the phenomenological effects of the participants' recollection of their experiences (van Manen, 2014).

This chapter presents background information about each participant, as well as the key findings from the shared lived experiences of these participants.

About the Participants: Trustee One

Trustee One, who has been a member of her community college board of trustees for three years, is an attorney who has her own practice in her county. She came from a family with five children. Her father was a firefighter in a large city and her mother was a homemaker. Neither of her parents went to college. She was the first in her family to go to college. After completing her bachelor's degree, Trustee One only applied to one law school, which was the most affordable one she could find. Tuition at the time was $7,000 or $8,000 per year. In her community, she was aware of her local community college. As a Girl Scouts Leader, she used to bring her troop to the college's planetarium. She took her own children to the college for the summer swimming program. She was

aware that the community college did good things primarily for people in the community. She didn't know much about what the college did for the students. She viewed the community college as an important resource for the students who can't afford to pay to go to college anywhere else.

Prior to joining her community college's board of trustees, Trustee One was on the environmental commission and the board of health in one township for about five years. She was elected to the planning board after she and her husband moved to a new municipality. Trustee One joined her local community college board of trustees after responding to an RFP on the county government's website. During her first month on the board, Trustee One participated in the college's new trustee training program, which consisted of four one-hour sessions that took place before her first four board meetings. During those sessions, she learned about the types of people that attend the college, completion rates, and trustee ethics.

About the Participants: Trustee Two

Once a public school teacher, Trustee Two, who has been on her local community college board for three years, now works as a sales trainer for a technology company. She attended a small out-of-state university. She was the fifth generation member of her family to attend that university. One of her daughters graduated from the same university as sixth generation. While in college, Trustee Two had her first experience with community college. She took a summer class at her local community college after her freshman year in order to make up credit for a course she failed..

Trustee Two had previously served as a member of her townships' school board and township council. After completing her term on town council and being away form

public life for several years, Trustee Two applied to the local county government officials for a position on her community college's board of trustees. She thought her previous experience as a school board member and township councilwoman would give her the edge to land the position with the community college board. However, she was not prepared for the budgetary questions she was asked during the interview and did not get the appointment.

About a year later, another opportunity to apply for the community college board of trustees came about. The local county government officials wanted to replace all of the appointed trustees as their terms expired because the college had gone through a scandal involving a high ranking employee. This time around, Trustee Two prepared. She went to the open house for potential students because she wanted to see the attendees experienced. She also started talking to people in the community about the community college. She learned that a woman she knows in the community had gone to the community college's nursing program. Trustee Two also learned that her neighbor's son is an Olympic athlete, and he went to the community college because the college worked with him to accommodate his training schedule. During her second interview, she impressed the county officials, and they appointed her to the community college board of trustees.

Trustee Two was just one of many new trustees to join the board, thanks in large part to a recent scandal involving an administrator. There was an orientation for new trustees, where they all learned about the different college departments, the fiduciary role of the trustees, and the history of the community college.

About the Participants: Trustee Three

Trustee Three has served on her community college board of trustees for four years, and was recently reappointed to a second four-year term. She is a stay at home mom who finds her duties as a community college trustee to be her intellectual outlet. She attended a highly selective public research university out of state, where she majored in Spanish and minored in government. She had no previous experience with community colleges prior to joining her local board of trustees, other than taking her children to the college's pool and going to the college to see fireworks shows.

One of Trustee Three's relatives is a prominent former politician, and she is very active in the township political committee, where she currently serves as the vice chair. The political committee tries very hard to control what's going on in the town council. Trustee Three thinks it was her relative's idea for her to join the community college board of trustees. Somebody from the community college called her asking for her résumé. She sent it in and then she received a phone call telling her that the local county government officials had appointed her to the board. She received a new board member orientation an hour prior to being sworn in at her first meeting, where she learned board policy when dealing with the news media and the strategic plan for the college.

About the Participants: Trustee Four

Now retired, Trustee Four relocated to the state after a 26-year career as an officer in the United States military. At the time of this study, he had served on the board of trustees for a year and a half. For the majority of his military career, he worked as a military researcher. As part of his job, the military paid for him to attend graduate school for two years, where he earned his Ph.D. Earning his Ph.D. set Trustee Four up

for a career being a funder of other people's research. He attended a polytechnic institute with an ROTC scholarship that allowed him to stay an extra year to earn his master's degree. Well after completing his Ph.D., Trustee Four returned to graduate school and earned his M.B.A. When Trustee Four and his wife were first married, he took a couple courses on electronics at the local community college. His wife was actually recruited to be a chemistry teacher at a community college. Prior to enrolling in an MBA program, Trustee Four took three semesters of accounting at a community college. In addition, Trustee Four's son took computer classes at the local community college.

Trustee Four volunteered as a tutor in the public schools and at the local humane society. He never pursued becoming a community college trustee because he thought that one had to be politically connected, which he was not. But then as a member of the local community band, Trustee Four met the Chair of the local community college board of trustees. The board chair saw something in Trustee Four that she thought would be good for a board of trustees. She submitted Trustee Four's résumé to the community college president, who then submitted it to the local county government officials. It probably didn't hurt that Trustee Four was registered in the same political party as the majority of the county officials. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed to the community college board of trustees. Once he joined the board, Trustee Four had a new trustee orientation where he met one-on-one with the community college president for a few hours, where he learned about college governance and what his relationship to the board was and what his relationship to her was.

Themes

After interviewing these community college trustees who recently completed their first year of service on their community college boards and analyzing the data, the following major phenomenological themes were identified:

1. Trustees who participated in this study became more engaged with their community colleges during their first year of service after attending and participating in events that showcased student accomplishment.
2. Trustees who participated in this study learned the sobering reality of the fiduciary responsibility during their first year of service.
3. Community college trustees who participated in this study took on a multi-faceted external role to the college as ambassador, advocate, or both.

Theme 1. Trustees who participated in this study became more engaged with their community colleges during their first year of service after attending and participating in events that showcased student accomplishment. All four participants talked at length about experiences they had in their first year of service attending community college events that showcased student accomplishment, and how seeing those students in their moments of glory had a positive impact on them as community college trustees. These experiences helped to inform their decision-making in board meetings. In addition, these experiences helped trustees to better understand the mission of the community college.

Trustee One shared her experience attending the community college's nurse pinning ceremony. She related to these students because the nursing program is very difficult, and the rigor reminded her of her experiences in law school:

> Each year we have two pinning ceremonies for the nurses. They are beautiful ceremonies and I hate to miss them. I think I've been to three or four so far. I spoke at one because it's a small group of about 50 students. The students are so excited. They are so proud. They went through such a difficult program. And most of them, their parents are nurses or they have other family members who are nurses or they have some sponsor type person who is in the crowd. And these are people who are staying in the community to help the community. I get to talk to the students at the nurse pinnings. I get to see them. I get to hear from their professors, and their professors lay it on the line. We had some students who failed. They are allowed to fail one course once. If they take it again and fail again, they are out of the program and can never enter the program again. So, the professors talk about the program. They talk about how hard it is for them to work with these students that are having difficulties and they talk about the bonding experience. It's like when I went through law school. When I went through law school it was hard. I was living it, I was breathing it, I couldn't think of anything else. That's what these nursing students do. So it's that bond. The students get up there and they talk about, "Remember the all-nighter we spent doing this or remember our first year class we never thought we'd pass?" I don't see that so much at graduation but the nurse pinning, it's a closer group.

Trustee Two realized the importance of the community college and its role in the community when she attended an ESL/GED graduation ceremony:

I was asked to stand in for the board chair at the ESL/GED graduation at one of our branch campuses. So I get there, and there are women, young ladies, dressed in – my opinion – prom dresses. These long gowns, decked to the nines, and I'm thinking, "OK…What is this?" I went in and the only thing I didn't have at that graduation was a box of tissues. Because the stories these people told about what they had to go through to get their GED or ESL… We had a woman from Poland who got married and came over here. Her husband was American. She was driving with her daughter in the car and she got lost. A police officer pulled her over to help her and she didn't know how to communicate with the police officer. She had to call her husband and have her husband translate to the police officer, "She's lost, can you get her home?" That's a terrifying experience. Especially if you have a child in the car. And to see the ages of people. There was a woman in her 70s and she finally got her GED. She always wanted to get her GED and she finally did it. These people, they really worked at it. When I arrived I was just kind of surprised. It just never occurred to me. It was a real big deal for these people. And the speeches. It was heartbreaking about what they've done. And what we take for granted. And sometimes people will say, "Oh, you can go to the community college, you know, 13th grade, that type of thing." But, those people it's not that at all… it's, "I can't believe I did it. That thing I've been reaching for my whole life and I finally got it. I got into the club! I got my high school diploma. I can sit at the table now. I'm

> not embarrassed because I didn't do something." Because there are stigmas that we all put on each other. And now they can do it. When I came to the next board meeting, I said, "That's why we're here. Yes, we're here for the people who cross the line at commencement, who are going to transfer to four-year colleges and universities. That's wonderful. But these people? That's what we're here for." That was my turning point.

Trustee Three learned first-hand about the impact scholarships have on community college students when she attended a scholarship dinner during her first year on the board of trustees:

> I tried to immerse myself. I attended things like the scholarship dinners, the retirements, the groundbreakings, anything I could go to. You learn to connect, because you are connecting with the people of the college. The scholarship dinner features excellent students who have really excelled in math, for example. There will be an award for math or science or language. And the stories behind the students are one of hardship, because I grew up in a very normal typical classic American family. So, it's amazing… The students get to speak and we hear their stories. I think that it is very, very amazing to hear their stories and their struggles.

Trustee Four, who holds a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, and a Ph.D., recalled how he felt after the first community college commencement he attended, as well as the Equal Opportunity Fund dinner he attended:

> I was surprised about how authentic I felt at that first commencement. Basically, going to all of these affairs and I'm proud of the kids and what

they are able to do given the relative disadvantage or lack of advantage that they are coming from. They are making something good happen with very few resources to do it with. That whole experience is probably my favorite part of being a trustee. I did make a point of and enjoy, when there were public events, to which board members were invited, to go to those. There have been two Educational Opportunity Fund awards dinners in the year and a half I've been doing this and they are uplifting experiences. I think that made a difference to the students. What it said to them was that it was significant from the point of view of that level of administration in the college. I've gone to both the nursing convocations. Very uplifting ceremony. I think that made a difference to those people that were there. I think it adds significance for the honorees. For the EOF participants who are being recognized... That somebody on the board cares that I'm being recognized. Same thing with the nursing convocations. I had my own undergraduate graduation and master's degree, MBA, and Ph.D. and they all seemed kind of synthetic. "What does this have to do with me?" I thought. The first community college commencement I went to really seemed authentic. I felt like I belong in this gown, and this is a real thing. That was the most meaningful academic pageant that I had ever participated in. That ceremony was really about the graduates. Their families saw that you were there and said, "This must be important because the trustees are all here." And the EOF dinner… the students were one of the fabulous aspects of it. I was

the director of grants and contract services at a four-year university, and oversaw the EOF program there. I was working with that director all the time, keeping the program in compliance, so I knew a little bit about EOF. But this was much more personal. There, I'm in a big city and sure there is poverty or else you wouldn't need an EOF. Here, I felt that EOF instead of being peripheral was more central to the meaning of community college experience. A lot of these kids, but for the community college, wouldn't have a postsecondary opportunity at all. Many of the stories of the sacrifices, even with the support of EOF, the sacrifices they were making... Working, raising a family, at the commencement and at the nursing convocation, it must have been 20, 30 percent of the time when somebody walked across the stage, there was somebody out in the audience who yelled, "Mommy!" That didn't happen any place else I had been. These are people who are somehow managing to raise a family and work and take an academic program, and probably other things I'm not able to guess. They multi-tasked and they got it done. You have to admire what they are doing. It's a small thing to ask to have a trustee show up to witness their triumph.

Trustee Four concluded:

I was pretty rocked and shaken by that first commencement and how authentic it felt but in general I'd say the sustainable and sustaining most moving part is seeing kids who are having a success and from having a life that maybe kind of meandered a little bit. So, they weren't going off

> to Oxford or Princeton or Harvard or wherever, and now they're having success experiences and achieving distinctions and feeling that they can have success. It's satisfying because you are doing something for somebody else. Your being there adds significance… and something being significant is a large part of being worthwhile. If those nurses or EOF kids or kids at commencements did their walk and nobody cared to watch, well it means a lot less to them, right? So you can add significance by being there. In a way, it's just the right thing to do. If you are a part of that community to help the other people in that community feel significance for their achievements.

Theme 2. Trustees who participated in this study learned the sobering reality of the fiduciary responsibility during their first year of service. All four participants shared their experiences during their first year of service that served as eye openers to the harsh fiscal reality community colleges are currently operating within, and the personal impact that having to make decisions in the best fiscal interest of the college has had on them as trustees.

Trustee One, whose college underwent a reduction in force, shared:

> Some of the department heads joined us at a trustees' retreat we had to explain where the college is going and what to do from here. And I realized at that time that the budget is so important. We just got through a reduction in force. It was a hairy experience. It was tough. It was very, very hard for the president, too. Everybody had input. It's based on financials, but there's a human element and you can't take that factor

away. Some professors left on their own. But some we had to cut. And we also had to increase the tuition. As a trustee, you have to look at the college in the long term. And you have to say long term versus, "I'm sorry, professor, but we're going to have to let you go." And that was hard. So that started a year ago, during my first year on the board. And at that time during the retreat we see what the demographics are and we see what the financials are. I said, "Wow, this is big." If you don't plan in advance, and we're not talking like a one-year plan, we're not even talking a five-year plan, we're talking a 10-year plan. And that was so significant. You're kind of like right down the middle… you want the professors to have jobs but you as a trustee have a responsibility for the long term… It was hard. We could have just said, "Ok we're going to raise the tuition, period. We're not getting rid of anyone." We could have said that. But that did not seem like the right balance to strike. What we needed to do was say, "Let's evaluate each and every department and every program and try not to put the burden on the students. And yes, that's affordable." And even if we did put the burden on the student, it wouldn't have been that much compared to the private colleges. So still, that was something I struggled with. I was thinking, "We're doing well. We have a great college, all the professors are fantastic." But I think we struck a balance. Let's do the tuition half and let's do the human element half. So that's what we did. It was a tough decision. But I felt a stronger connection to the college because I did live up to the responsibility. And

> truthfully it would have been easier if I said, "Well, let's keep this professor, and let's keep that professor. Let's keep the sports team." But you can't. You have to look at it as a whole.

Trustee Two's community college also had to go through a reduction in force, but that was after a scandal involving a college administrator. The reputation of the community college had been damaged, and the county officials and community members had lost trust in the board of trustees and the college as a whole. So, providing financial support to the college became questionable, with the local county government cutting funding to the college as a result, putting the community college in a budget deficit:

> That administrator was gone when I joined the board. And that's been one of the challenges. The staff. They always feel like they're getting beat up. It seems like, because of what had happened, no matter who took that administrator's job, there was going to be increased pressure on this person. Scrutiny… Everybody's looking at every department. When I was first on the board, a special committee consisting of administrators, faculty, and staff was created to look at every single department. They had 18 months to go through every single department. What makes sense? What doesn't make sense? What's efficient, what's not efficient? That report was the basis of our restructuring. That was the RIF. The reallocation of resources that happened. It was expedited because of that budget deficit. And it goes to the fact that we were eating into our reserves. It was interesting for me, sitting on the board getting faculty

> member after faculty member and telling us we were destroying the school and it was so fast. For me, coming out of corporate, two or three years for a RIF? You had a committee, you had all this… it's not fast, people. It's not fast at all. Corporate it's a 15-minute conference call. "Hello, you're done. You're out." And you don't have the opportunity to say, "This is what I've been doing here." Everybody had the opportunity to meet and say, "You know what, this job isn't valuable today to the student, but if we make it like this, that's a good idea." That is how to do it.

Trustee Three recalled that during her first year on the board, she became experienced with matters dealing with faculty promotion and compensation:

> My first year, I remember a close friend was on the board with me. We had this situation with a professor who didn't get tenure. All of the students came to speak on his behalf. And your heart wants to break, because the students really liked him. The professor didn't get tenure because the president at the time felt that he didn't fulfill the requirements of tenure. My friend just turned to me and said, "Just remember there are a lot of things that have to happen for a person to get tenure." And she reminded me, "It's not just going to a classroom and teaching the students. It's being a leader in that discipline and doing other administrative things that go above and beyond just teaching a class." I thought it was interesting. Because me, I'm like a bleeding heart. I just wanted to give the guy tenure. And then we have students come talk

about labor contracts. It's always hard to get a labor contract signed. It's interesting to have students talk on behalf of the faculty because students don't realize that every time we give the faculty a raise we have to raise tuition. It's a balancing act. The mission of the community college is to provide affordable, high quality higher education. And while my heart goes out to the faculty and students, and we want to pay them as much as we can, there is a responsibility as a community college to make sure we're providing that first part, affordable. That's the trick. That's the balance. Making sure your faculty are taken care of but also making it affordable for the students. And with the declining population, we're all facing it right now. A decline in enrollment, which isn't helping us. And health care costs. The whole health care thing is a huge issue and it's going to come into play this next contract. Faculty have taken a loss over the years. They are getting salary cuts because they are paying so much into their health care. There's not much you can get from us. We only have so much to give. The money we get from the state and county is very little. And I can understand that. I can understand the taxpayers not wanting to pay for everything.

Trustee Four shared his concern with being responsible for the assets the community college holds:

> One thing that we didn't touch on that I find sobering is any community college is a big capital investment. There are a lot of buildings here, a lot of equipment here, tens of millions of dollars of assets. The financial part

because overseeing that… That could go bad. If you don't reinvest in keeping up the facilities, then it doesn't do anything good for the impression that people have of your institution. It reduces your chance at student success, it reduces your financial stability, it affects all three parts of our strategic plan. So, pulling back on maintaining your facilities isn't a good plan. You can do a lot of borrowing. And one of our documents shows about $10 million of improvements over the past few years. If your annual budget is $10 million, $10 million is a lot of money to plow back into new air conditioners, new heaters, new communications systems, and new roofs. I'm not saying that we've done it but it would be possible to go overboard and be renewing your facilities to the extent that it is counterproductive. Just the delicacy of that balance… If you think about that fiscal plant aspect and the fiscal challenges related to maintaining that, this is totally separate than the satisfactions of seeing the students achieving success. It's very cold. But it's important and I even use the word dangerous. There are ways to go wrong big time. If there were an additional aspect that we didn't talk about it would be stewarding the fiscal management and the asset management of the college… keeping facilities that are adequate or more than adequate, being efficient. Not wasting any of those tuition dollars, those dollars from the state and the county but on the other hand not being too stingy that, again, you're hurting the impression people have of the college. You're impeding student success because they can't get the classes,

> we're closing rooms because the heater doesn't work. And, if you try to go stingy, you reduce your financial stability because your building a balloon payment out there, all the sudden all the roofs are going to need to be replaced. It's got to be the board thinking about that fiscal plant renewal. I think fiscal management is real important and probably most board members want to back away slowly, it doesn't come up very happy, but you've got to face it, because that's an essential part of the reality. It's just managing the physical plant and having the fiscal plan to go with it. That's an important part of being a trustee but probably underemphasized and its consequential but it is rarely a front burner issue, maybe it doesn't come up in a whole year of board meetings but I think board members need to keep that in the back of their mind. Be feeding the facilities beast, but just enough so the beast stays alive and is doing a good job. Not so it gets fat, and not so it gets sick. A totally subjective balance. If I were to list worries, that's probably at the top of my worry list. Those long-term investments in the college.

Theme 3. Community college trustees who participated in this study took on a multi-faceted external role to the college as ambassador, advocate, or both. During their first year of service, the participating community college trustees realized that they serve as ambassadors and advocates for their community colleges. As ambassadors, the study participants promoted the college to members of the community and answered questions people had of the college. As advocates, the study participants provided information to

county officials and other policymakers in order to garner support for community colleges.

Trustee One talks to a lot of people in the community, particularly when she goes grocery shopping. She talked about an encounter she had:

> Every time I go to the grocery store, I talk to moms. My daughter's in high school, so I know all of the moms and they're all talking about where their kids are going to college and what they are doing. Whenever I talk to a parent – this is what they say… "Yes, I realize that and my son," – one of the moms – "my son decided to go to community college and he's going to be graduating with a suitcase full of money rather than a suitcase full of debt like my daughter, the one that insisted on going out of state."

At Trustee One's community college, trustees serve as members of advisory boards for the college's academic programs. She recalled her experiences participating in two of those advisory board meetings:

> I went to a radiography advisory committee. There were 14 people sitting at a conference table. They were from the local hospitals and the local surgical unit. They want to be here, at our college, and they want to know what we're doing and what we're teaching and how we're teaching it. They want to talk to the professors who are teaching it. One representative pointed out, "Ok good, but are you telling them that they have to wash their hands before and after?" Because we had the Ebola outbreak at that time. She said, "That's really important. The only thing

> we noticed routinely some of the students who are interning there, they're not doing it." And that's such a basic thing. They all come to provide feedback on our students. They say, "We'll take three more, or we'll take five more for internships." The surgical unit, for example, normally takes five students every year. That is so important for the trustees to participate in, because then they can see how the community is participating. On another occasion, I went to the exercise science advisory committee meeting. Several rehabilitation clinics and physical therapy clinics were there, and they love the community college. They say every time, "We take somebody from your community college, they know what they're doing. We don't have to train them. They're good and we keep them." The advisory committees meet every six months. They are important because then you know what the community's needs are. When trustees attend these committee meetings, it makes the professors feel important because they say, "A trustee is here. They must want to know what our program is and what's going on with it." And the people from the business sector, they love it because they feel like they are there to help. They talk to us one-on-one. At every trustee meeting, we share what we've learned by attending these advisory committee meetings. It's helpful.

Trustee Two, whose board had been through several changes since one of its administrators was forced to resign due to a scandal, discussed how the board had worked to secure fiscal stability to the college, and now needs to take the next steps:

> We've gotten our ducks in a row, now let's showcase it. And that's what our president has been trying to get everybody to realize. "This is how I need you to help me. I need you to reach out to your political connections and have them maintain our funding." Yeah, we'd love you to increase it but let's not get crazy. Maintain our funding. Spread the good word. Versus some of the trustees have felt sometimes that they should do the president's job. Let's do some more community outreach and leverage our individual connections.

Trustee Three is in a unique role, being related to a prominent politician. She carries credibility and clout because of her family lineage. She discussed her role as ambassador and advocate:

> I always tout how great the community college is, because it is such a great college. I tell all parents that I know who are having kids that might fall into that situation that it's such a good value for your money. I know people who have gone to the community college who have kids in town. But also, I have not often, but I have brought an issue to the chairman of the county political party once to try to help with smoothing something on the board. If you're working to make something a better place, hopefully you're an advocate for it. That doesn't mean you should be talking to politicians about it, because I don't think just anybody should be doing that. But important in my position, that's what happens, being related to a politician. But, I think, "What's the point if you're not an advocate?" I'm not sure why you are on the board.

Trustee Four recalled his experience working with a county official to clarify a misconception:

> There's one county official, I remember, he was saying, "I don't like you hiring all these people to do handholding to get people through." Because we hire to check back with students to say, "Why didn't you register? Is it money? You don't have time? Or you didn't know it was time to register?" He said, "I don't like all this hand holding stuff. That's for sissies. Real men get through college on their own." So I was able to go back to that guy and I said, "Let me give you an example, we found that there were 30 people who had dropped off our roles that were within a very small number of credits of graduating, but they just didn't come back. We followed up with those 30 people. And 18 of them said, "We didn't realize that we were that close." All 18 re-matriculated and finished and the other 12 had transferred to other colleges and didn't realize with the transfer credits they had from those other places that they could get an associate degree here. And they said, "Yeah, we'd be interested in that." So, I gave that county official that feedback and he said, "OK, well, that's not exactly handholding, that's good. I like that." That's an example of the kind of thing where somebody has an impression of the college that we're left wing hand holders, not real supporters of independent spirit. We weren't really mollycoddling people, we were just giving them information that let them make decisions that benefitted them. That's an example of feedback to county officials, where

> an issue came up and I could have let it just go, but I closed the loop with the person that I think at least mitigated their concern.

Summary

The community college trustees who participated in this study take their roles and responsibilities very seriously. The time they spent during their first year on their boards participating in events that showcase student accomplishment helped them to become more engaged trustees. The experiences they had at board meetings, committee meetings, and board retreats helped them to better understanding their fiduciary responsibility. In addition, the trustees who participated in this study took on external roles by becoming ambassadors and/or advocates for their community colleges.

During the third round of interviews with these participants, I took the opportunity to ask each of them what their first year experience meant to them. The common theme that emerged from all four participants is that the first year as a community college trustee presents an opportunity to learn more about the role and develop a comfort level by becoming engaged with the school and developing a true understanding of the fiduciary role.

Trustee One said that her first year meant she could help the community by working cohesively with the other members of the board:

> To make a difference with the school, which is a reflection of the community. I saw that I was able to get along with the board. We were all on the same wave length. I thought that was good. I was there just to try to help bring the right students to the school that should be there.

Trustee Two shared how the first year gave her the chance to learn her responsibilities, as well as to find the one thing she could do to help the board function while the college was recovering from a scandal involving a former administrator:

> I was very proud to be associated with the college. To be successful, I had to be very open to learn. I had to be open to learn what my role was. I couldn't come in with a preconceived notion. You have to be open to figuring out where you can help. You can't help everything. Figure out what you can do. I have to make one contribution. My first year, my entire role was to put the fingers in the dam because there had been so much tension within the board. In many ways I thought that was silly. But the staff came back and said they were thankful that I was here.

Trustee Three shared how she used her first year to learn her responsibilities. As a stay at home mom, she treated her role on the board as a job that provided an outlet from her busy family life:

> I think the first year, you are really learning. I don't know if you feel like you are accomplishing all that much. For me, it was learning about the school. For me, who doesn't go to a job, it was my intellectual outlet. It's like a job. I get to use my brain. For me, that's what I look forward to. And I would get excited because I was able to help in something bigger than my own little nucleus of a family.

Trustee Four shared that not only did he learn about his roles and responsibilities on the board, he learned that since he was in a new position, he had to be careful what he

says in public and how he says it, as he now is looked upon by members of the community as a community college trustee:

> One thing that it certainly means is that you are a little bit more responsible for what you say and do. Now it's not just goofy old so and so saying such a thing, but people are interpreting that through the lens of this person's a member of the board of trustees. You have to think about how what you say and do reflects… it's a two edged tool. It gives you the power to do good as well as to flub. You have to be prudent about what you are saying to different audiences. It may also give you the potential to affect other people in a positive way. Another thing it meant for me, if you take it seriously, you'll be challenged, you'll be stretched, you'll be encountering problems that are not simple to solve and that whatever you have to give, whatever you bring to the situation, you'll be able to use all of it to address the questions that come before the board. It's entirely possible to sit there at the meeting and do nothing. But it can be challenging and exhilarating. It means they'll be having that experience. There are a lot of satisfactions related to interacting with people that I wouldn't have interacted with otherwise. The people I met at student events aren't people that I meet in my other activities. It's a new slice of people and it's rewarding to expand your dome of empathy. The people that you are aware of gets expanded, you're not just aware of them, you're getting in touch with their triumphs. That's pretty exciting. Expanding your humanity. You're relating to a larger group of other

people. At the same time relating in a deep enough way that you are sharing their triumphs. That's very meaningful.

As stated earlier, phenomenology strives to identify the uniqueness of experiences as people live through them (van Manen, 2014). What these themes illustrate is the uniqueness of being a first-year community college trustee. The experience is authentic because of the exposure to students during events and the colleges' similar missions to uplift individuals. What is also unique is that while all of these trustees were appointed to their boards to provide oversight of their community colleges, they became emotionally invested in the success of their colleges and their students. That investment made fiscal decisions emotionally trying for each of the participants, yet also drove these trustees to become active to serve as ambassadors and advocates within their communities outside of board meetings.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

This chapter includes a summary of the research conducted, a discussion of the conclusions drawn from the findings, and recommendations for community college trustee boards, national- and state-level community college trustee associations, and further research. This chapter concludes with a summary of the research project as a whole.

Summary of Research Conducted

This phenomenological study was designed to better understand the meaning of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service on their boards. Phenomenology is a qualitative method that does not contain explicit theoretical observation, since the researcher attempts to construct meaning from participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). I used phenomenology as a researcher to construct rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon of the first year of service as a community college trustee. I employed Seidman's (2006) three interview technique, which allowed me to establish a context of the participants' experiences during the first interview. During the second interview, the participants provided concrete details of their recalled lived experiences as first-year community college trustees. I used the transcripts of the first two series of interviews to construct anecdotes, the primary tool phenomenological researchers use to discover themes. During the third interview, I reviewed these anecdotes and themes with my participants, where they reflected in a concrete way on the meaning of their experiences.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this section, I discuss the conclusions I drew from the research findings. In addition, I use these findings and conclusions to answer my initial research question and sub-questions.

In order to develop conclusions and recommendations from the written anecdotes and the themes that surfaced from them, I employed Bloomberg and Volpe's (2012) If/Then/Therefore/Thus Matrix, which they recommend qualitative researchers use to develop trustworthy conclusions from data collected in studies. Using this tool, the "If" is the finding, the "Then" is the interpretation of the findings, and those two lead the researcher to conclusions and recommendations. In my study, I used the anecdotes as the findings and the themes they generated as my interpretations in order to get to the below conclusions and the related recommendations.

Conclusion 1: engagement. Exposure to student achievement helped these first-year trustees become engaged with the community college they serve, and influenced the policy-level decisions they contribute to during board meetings. All four participants in this study talked at length about experiences they had in their first year of service attending community college events that showcased student accomplishment, and how seeing those students in their moments of accomplishment had a positive impact on them as community college trustees. These experiences helped to inform decision-making in board meetings. In addition, these experiences helped trustees to better understand the mission of the community college.

For example, Trustee One shared how she related to the students at the college's nurse pinning ceremony. Being an attorney, Trustee One identified with students who

talked about the rigorous curriculum, staying up late to finish projects and study for exams, and working with other students to get through their program together. These stories reminded Trustee One of her experiences in law school. Trustee Two realized the importance of the community college and its role in the community when she attended an ESL/GED graduation ceremony, seeing all of the students dressed up and hearing their stories of finally earning a credential that can lead to more opportunities. Trustee Three realized how important the community college was to the community when she attended a scholarship dinner during her first year on the board of trustees and heard from students about how much of a difference the scholarships make towards their education. Trustee Four, who holds a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, and a Ph.D., recalled how authentic he felt during the first community college commencement he attended because he witnessed students having success.

Conclusion 2: stress and worry. At times, serving as a community college trustee became stressful and worrisome for the participants in this study, especially when working through difficult fiduciary matters. Trusteeship is more than an appointment to represent the college. It is a serious responsibility that requires a great deal of time and effort to oversee of the college's assets and finances. All four participants shared their experiences during their first year of service that served as eye openers to the harsh fiscal reality community colleges are currently operating within, and the personal impact that having to make decisions in the best fiscal interest of the college has had on them as trustees.

Trustee One realized how important the college's budget was when she attended her first Board of Trustees retreat. She learned about enrollment trends and how they

impact a community college's finances. She and her fellow trustees had to undertake a reduction in force due to diminishing enrollment and reduced state and county operating funding. She shared how difficult the decisions were for her personally to lay off college employees, but reinforced that she had an obligation to create a long-term plan to ensure the college would be sustainable for future generations of students.

Trustee Two's community college had suffered a critical blow to its reputation after a scandal involving a college administrator. Because of the scandal, county officials and community members had lost trust in the community college and the board of trustees. So, providing financial support to the college became questionable, with the local county government cutting funding to the college. This put the community college in a budget deficit. As a result, Trustee Two's community college had to implement a reduction in force for long-term sustainability of the college. During the process, several members of the board questioned day-to-day expenses like the price of copy paper, as opposed to focusing on developing policies. As a result, Trustee Two took it upon herself to be the peacekeeper when these conversations came up during board meetings. She would ask her fellow members to focus their attention on student success.

Trustee Three shared how she learned through attending board meetings that the board has a balancing act of providing affordable higher education to students but at the same time making sure that the experience is of high quality. She talked about how she learned about the faculty tenure process, contract negotiations, the fiscal impact of declining student enrollment, and how the rising cost of health insurance impacts the college's budget. Trustee Three realized that the board only has so much money in its annual operating budget and can't provide large salary increases or better contributions

to health benefits packages, while at the same time maintaining an affordable tuition rate for students.

Trustee Four discussed how he worries about the college's buildings and equipment regularly. He talked about how being responsible for the college's assets is a delicate balance, and it is very different from the satisfactions of seeing the students achieve success. He shared how as a trustee he has to make decisions about how to allocate college funds ways that maintain the college's facilities and puts the college in the best position to serve students.

Conclusion 3: influence. The trustees who participated in this study are credible representatives of the community college who can influence community members, stakeholders, elected officials, and others on behalf of the community college. During their first year of service, the participating community college trustees realized that they serve as ambassadors and advocates for their community colleges. As ambassadors, these community college trustees promoted the college to members of the community and answered questions people had of the college. As advocates, these community college trustees provided information to county officials and other policymakers in order to garner support for community colleges.

Trustee One told the story of visiting her local grocery store, where she ran into the mother of one of her daughter's high school classmates. This mom and Trustee One talked about the benefits of attending the local community college. Trustee One also serves as a member of an advisory board for one of the college's academic programs. She talked about how important it is for her to hear first-hand from employers about what is expected of the college's graduates, as well as how employers are very satisfied

with the students the college is sending into the workforce. Trustee One shared that she informs her fellow board members of conversations she has with members of the community about the college, as well as the feedback she receives from employers from attending advisory committee meetings.

Trustee Two talked about how important it was for the members of the board of trustees to leverage their individual connections to county government officials in order to garner support for the community college. While the college may not see an increase in funding from these efforts, individual trustees can inform county government officials of the happenings at the college, dispelling any rumors.

Trustee Three carries credibility and clout because one of her family members is a prominent politician. She has used her position to advocate with county government officials to generate support for college initiatives. Trustee Three cautions that not every trustee can serve in this role, but at the same time, those with the credibility should use it to the college's benefit.

When a local county official questioned the community college hiring more counselors and advisors to improve retention, Trustee Four took it upon himself to provide this official with information to justify the initiative. While the county official thought of it as hand holding, Trustee Four shared how these efforts led to more students re-enrolling at the college to complete their associate degrees. Trustee Four could have let the issue go, but he saw that he could intervene and help the county official develop a better understanding of the initiative at the community college.

Addressing the Research Questions

This phenomenological study provided an answer to the following research question: What is the meaning of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service? In addition, this study answered the following sub questions: How do community college trustees learn their responsibilities? What do trustees know about community colleges before joining their boards? How do trustees develop connections to their community colleges, their missions, and their students?

Main research question. What is the meaning of the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service? One word can summarize the meaning of the shared lived experience of these participants in their first year of service as community college trustees: authenticity. The one thing that makes being a community college trustee unique is the authenticity of the feelings of seeing students succeed, the authenticity of the stress caused by making difficult fiscal decisions, and the authenticity in their beliefs in their community colleges and their missions to advocate for their colleges outside of board meetings.

Sub question 1. How do community college trustees learn their responsibilities? The participants in this study shared how they learned their roles and responsibilities, which included their own research, learning how their individual expertise can help them in their roles, building trust among other board members, and the importance of participating in board meetings and trustee education events. All four trustees who participated in this study shared stories about participating in new trustee orientation programs at their community colleges. The orientation programs varied in length. One trustee had an hour-long orientation prior to being sworn in, while another trustee had a

one-on-one orientation with the college president that lasted several hours. The remaining two trustees participated in new trustee orientation programs with other new trustees. These programs were run by the board chair and featured presentations from the college president and members of his/her cabinet.

Sub question 2. What do trustees know about community colleges before joining their boards? What trustees knew of community colleges prior to joining their boards of trustees varied from participant to participant in this study. What a trustee knows about community colleges prior to joining a board of trustees really depends on his or her own choices in life and experiences. Some may choose to attend a community college for college courses, personal enrichment, or community based programs and services, like holiday fireworks shows and access to the college's health club or swimming pool. Others may never come in contact with their local community college.

Trustee One was aware of her local community college because as a Girl Scouts Leader, she used to bring the girls to the college's planetarium. She took her kids to the college for the back yard swimming program. She didn't know much about what the college did for the students, but assumed that the college was an important resource for the students who can't afford to pay to go to college anywhere else.

Trustee Two had her first experience with community college while she was a student at an out-of-state four-year college. She enrolled in a summer course after her freshman year to transfer to her four-year college to make up for a bad grade she earned in a class. She remembered the class being difficult, contrary to what her initial impression of community college was.

Trustee Three had no previous experience with community colleges prior to joining her local board of trustees, other than taking her children to the college's pool and going to the college to see fireworks shows.

When Trustee Four and his wife were first married, he took a couple courses on electronics at the local community college. His wife was actually recruited to be a chemistry teacher at a community college. Prior to enrolling in an MBA program, Trustee Four took three semesters of accounting at a community college. Also, Trustee Four's son had an interest in computers while in high school. So, Trustee Four's son took computer science courses at the community college. When Trustee Four first arrived in the county he and his wife currently live in, he took a contemporary math course at the community college. In general, community colleges have been a resource for him and his family to become the people that they wanted to become.

Sub question 3. How do trustees develop connections to their community colleges, their missions, and their students? The trustees who participated in this study recalled that during their first year of service on their boards, being exposed to student achievement helped them to become engaged with the community college they serve. This experience of witnessing students in their moments of triumph influenced the policy-level decisions they contribute to during board of trustees meetings. These experiences also provided value to each trustee, as well as a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. As one trustee put it, "We don't get paid as trustees. We get paid something more." And that something more is the authentic satisfaction of knowing they contributed to student achievement.

Limitations

While this study does provide insight into the first-year experiences of community college trustees, it does not address gender as an issue among community college trustees. The single criterion used to select the sample for this study was whether or not the participants had recently completed their first year of service as community college trustees. For example, I did not explore whether or not the experiences these trustees had in their first year of service were in any way different due to gender. In addition, this study did not specify the shared meaning of the experiences of female community college trustees, or the shared meaning of the experiences of male community college trustees. In the state where this study was conducted, state law requires that at least two members of the community college board of trustees be women. It would be interesting to learn if the meaning of the shared lived experience of the first year of service as a community college trustee alters at all because of gender.

Recommendations

Community colleges are more important today than ever before, primarily because the global economy has created a demand for skills and talent (Lumina Foundation, 2014). The United States workforce will need more workers with post-secondary credentials in order to remain competitive in a global economy. Community colleges throughout the country serve as open-door institutions that provide access to higher education to all who desire to learn, regardless of wealth, heritage, or previous academic experience (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). Community colleges provide educational opportunities to people who can not afford tuition at four-year colleges and universities, and for people who otherwise have no chance of attending college (Cohen

& Brawer, 2008). As important as these community colleges are, very little research exists on boards of trustees that govern these institutions (Mellow & Heelan, 2008).

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, I recommend the following for community college boards of trustees to consider to ensure first-year community college trustees become engaged with the school and develop a comfort level with their roles and responsibilities:

- Community colleges should find creative ways to expose first-year trustees to programs and events that showcase student achievement. For example, some of these events, like scholarship award celebrations and recognition ceremonies, could be held just prior to regularly scheduled boards of trustees meetings. This may encourage trustees to attend such events.
- First-year trustees should participate in a detailed training session that covers their college's assets, budgets, buildings and grounds renovation and expansion plans, and student enrollment objectives and strategies in order to develop an understanding of the fiduciary role. With a comprehensive understanding of the fiduciary role, first-year trustees may be in a better position to prevent and/or address fiscal challenges that may transpire at the college.
- During trustee orientation, a session on "our students" should be included. This could be a presentation led by a student services officer featuring success stories from the different types of students who attend the college. Just as important, this presentation should also cover the challenges community college students face, such as financing their education, transportation to and from college, and child

care for their dependents. This would help trustees to better understand the student population that they serve.

- A presentation about the role of the trustee as ambassador and advocate for the school should be incorporated into all community college trustee orientation programs. This presentation would teach trustees how they can promote the college in the community and how they can advocate for the college with elected and appointed officials.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, I recommend that national and state level community college associations include presentations about the roles trustees play as ambassadors and advocates during conferences and other trustee education programs. These sessions could feature community college trustees who serve as ambassadors and advocates for their schools. Participating community college trustees could share their experiences working with elected officials, community members, potential students, and others to advance the mission of the community college.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, I recommend the following for further academic study:

- A qualitative study to learn how exposure to students impacts trustee-level decision-making and trustee engagement. In my study, I learned that the participants became more engaged in their work as trustees after attending events that showcased student accomplishment. It would be interesting to learn exactly how those experiences impact trustees and the decisions they have to make. A

case study of community college boards with members engaged as a result of exposure to students could accomplish this.

- A qualitative study to learn the meaning of the experiences of experienced trustees. In this study, I focused on the meaning of the shared lived experience of first-year trustees. It would serve as a contribution to the field of study of community college trusteeship to learn about long-term community college trustees, to conduct a similar phenomenological study of seasoned trustees to see how the meanings of their lived experiences compare to the meanings of the experiences of first-year trustees.
- A qualitative case study to learn how differently structured community college boards of trustees function. It would be interesting to understand the roles of community college trustees within boards that have committee structures compared to the roles of community college trustees within boards that do not have committee structures.
- A mixed methods study that measures the level of engagement community college trustees claim to have to their community colleges, but then describes the exact level of engagement trustees truly have to their colleges. This study would attempt to determine the espoused theories trustees have and compare those theories to the theories in use trustees apply in their performance of duties.
- A qualitative study of local elected officials to learn about the experiences of local elected officials when working with community college trustees. In my study, I learned that community college trustees have influence in the communities they serve. Specifically, the participants of my study all shared how

they have used that influence to advocate or promote their community colleges. It would be interesting to conduct a phenomenological study of local elected officials to learn about their experiences working with community college trustees. More importantly, this phenomenological study could be designed to discover the meaning of the shared lived experience of local county officials who work with community college trustees.

Summary

Over the past decade, there has been an increase in the calls for improved accountability, equity in educational attainment, and success for all college students by accreditation agencies, legislatures, educational and policy organizations, parents, and the public-at-large (McClenney & Mathis, 2011). During this same time, businesses have placed demands upon colleges to meet the changing needs of the global economy (McClenney & Mathis, 2011), which has created a demand for skills and talent (Lumina Foundation, 2014). Most countries throughout the world have responded to this by increasing higher education attainment of their people, but the United States has not (Lumina Foundation, 2014).

The reason for increased educational accountability is simple. The United States workforce will need more workers with post secondary credentials in order to remain competitive in a global economy. Between 1973 and 2008, the share of jobs in the United States economy that required postsecondary education increased from 28 percent to 59 percent, and the percentage of postsecondary jobs will increase from 59 percent to 63 percent over the next decade (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). As of 2012, the percentage of the United States' working age population, age 25 to 64,

with at least an associate degree is 39.4 percent (Lumina Foundation, 2014). By 2018, 22 million new jobs in the United States will require college degrees, but the country will fall short of that number by at least 3 million post-secondary degrees (Carnevale et al., 2010). In addition, jobs in the United States economy will need at least 4.7 million new workers with postsecondary certificates (Carnivale et al., 2010). High school graduates and dropouts will not have the credentials they need in the coming decade as employers seek workers to fill jobs that require postsecondary degrees (Carnevale et al., 2010).

The public attention to community colleges – and the role they can play to help improve the educational attainment of Americans – has grown over the past few years. For example, in 2009 President Obama challenged community colleges throughout the country to graduate an additional five million students by 2020 and play a critical role in the United States once again leading the world with the highest proportion of college graduates (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.). More recently, President Obama proposed America's College Promise, a first-dollar federal scholarship that, if enacted, would cover tuition and fees for responsible students to attend two years of community college (Stump, 2015). In addition, state governments and private foundations are working diligently to address the large number of students who come to community colleges unprepared for college-level coursework (Jobs for the Future, 2011). Community colleges are more important today than ever before as they work to produce qualified, skilled workers as well as an educated citizenry so that the United States can remain competitive in a global economy.

Boards of trustees govern these community colleges. The boards of trustees have

the final authority over the affairs of higher education institutions in the United States (Michael & Schwartz, 2000). Mellow and Heelan (2008) report that while very little research or analysis exists on community college boards of trustees, there are community college trustee standards created and promoted by national and state organizations. Several authors, scholars, and practitioners have written various guidelines to help improve trustee governance (Carver, 1997; Chait, Ryan, & Taylor, 2005; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Polonio, 2005; Potter & Phelan, 2008). In addition, practitioners and scholars have written about the establishment of college trustee boards in the United States, the roles trustees play on their boards, characteristics of board members, trustee selection processes, trustees' involvement in academic affairs, competencies boards of trustees should possess, and orientation and professional development programs that currently exist for community college boards of trustees members.

This research study focused on the shared lived experiences of community college trustees during their first year of service on their boards. My goal was to understand the meaning of trustees' experiences during their first year of service. I learned how the participating community college trustees learned their roles and responsibilities through orientation programs, attending board meetings, and observing prominent, seasoned trustees on their boards. I learned that trustees serve on their boards as ambassadors and advocates for their community colleges, even though those responsibilities are not expected of them. I also now understand that trustees develop relationships with their colleges, their missions, and the students they serve by

witnessing students in their moments of triumph during student-centered celebration events.

The community college trustees who participated in this study take their roles and responsibilities very seriously. They spent their first year on their boards participating in events that showcase student accomplishment; better understanding their fiduciary responsibility; and becoming ambassadors and advocates for their colleges. The first year as a community college trustee presents an opportunity to learn more about the role and develop a comfort level by becoming engaged with the school and developing a true understanding of the fiduciary role. But more importantly, the one word that can describe the shared meaning of the experiences of these trustees is authenticity. That is the one thing that makes being a community college trustee unique… the feelings of seeing students succeed, the stress caused by making difficult fiscal decisions, and the belief in the community college and its mission to advocate for the college outside of board meetings.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol 1

Interviewer Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I'm working on my dissertation to complete my Doctorate in Education as part of Rowan University's Community College Leadership Initiative Doctoral Program. I appreciate your help. Before I get into my formal questions, may I have your permission to record this interview on my digital recorder? I will need to transcribe this interview to help me analyze everything you share with me. Thank you. Now, let's begin.

Interviewee Questions

1. What were your experiences prior to joining the community college board of trustees?
2. What situations influenced or affected your experiences that led you to join the board of trustees?
3. As I transcribe the recorded interview and review my notes, may I contact you again with any follow-up questions that I may have?

Interviewer Closing

Thank you once again for your time. I appreciate your help.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol 2

Interviewer Introduction

Thank you for your continued help as I conduct my research study. I would like to talk with you more specifically about your experiences during your first year of service as a community college trustee. Before I get into my formal questions, may I have your permission to record this interview on my digital recorder? As before, I will need to transcribe this interview to help me analyze everything you share with me. Thank you. Now, let's begin.

Interviewee Questions

1. What were your experiences during your first year of service as a community college trustee?
2. What situations typically influenced or affected your experiences during your first year of service as a trustee?
3. As I transcribe the recorded interview and review my notes, may I contact you again with any follow-up questions that I may have?

Interviewer Closing

Thank you once again for your time. I appreciate your help.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol 3

Interviewer Introduction

Thank you for your continued help as I complete my research study. For this last interview, I would like to share these written summaries of the stories you told me based on our first and second interviews. After you read each story, I will have a few questions for you. Before we begin, may I have your permission to record this interview on my digital recorder? I will need to transcribe this interview to help me analyze everything you share with me. Thank you. Now, let's begin.

Interviewee Questions (after participants read each anecdote)

1. Is this what your experience was really like?
2. Have I captured the meaning of the experience properly?
3. Would you change anything about the story or the meaning? If so, what?
4. Is there anything missing that I have not shared with you?
5. As I transcribe the recorded interview and review my notes, may I contact you again with any follow-up questions that I may have?

Interviewer Closing

Thank you once again for your time. I appreciate your help.