Summer 2016

Ethical Leadership in Today's Community Colleges: Presidents Respond to the Completion Agenda

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ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN TODAY'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

PRESIDENTS RESPOND TO THE COMPLETION AGENDA

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of

Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Community College Leadership

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
May 2016

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ABSTRACT

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN TODAY'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
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The role of ethical leadership for community college presidents is of concern (Anderson, Harbour, & Davies; Wood & Nevarez, 2014), especially given the added pressure on community colleges to increase completion rates for student populations that have historically underperformed academically. In these times of increased scrutiny to produce more college-educated people ready to enter the workforce, college CEO's are facing a completion agenda climate that is rampant with financial constraints, greater demands from stakeholders, and governmental mandates. The purpose of this descriptive, multiple case study was to examine how community college presidents execute ethical leadership in responding to institutional policy implications stemming from the completion agenda. This study explored the ethical construct Achieving the Dream (ATD) community college presidents operationalized as they employed decision-making processes related to implementing completion agenda policies at their institutions.

The findings revealed several themes that contribute to community college presidents' ethical leadership: accountably to stakeholders, advocacy for and validation of the community college mission and its students, transparency in decision-making and issues confronting the community college, and equity when dealing with students, the community and employees.

Keywords: ethical leadership, ethical decision-making, completion agenda, community college

This dissertation is dedicated to four special men in my life: my grandfather, who despite a fifth grade education was one of the brightest men I have ever known and taught me at an early age that "you have to make it with your books"; my husband, Brian, whose love and support during this doctoral journey has been unwavering; my oldest son, Justin, who was in the midst of middle school when my journey began and has seen his mother at far fewer basketball games; and my youngest son, Nicholas, who was in the fourth grade when my doctoral journey began and has learned to become an independent middle schooler. It is my hope and prayer that watching their mother's dedication and commitment to achieving this goal will remind them often of the importance of working hard for your education.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my friend, colleague, and fellow ODU, CCL cohort 12 classmate, Erika Poindexter, who passed away far too soon. Erika's devotion to student success and the community college mission were unwavering.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people at Old Dominion University who have contributed to the successful completion of my dissertation. First and foremost, my dissertation director, Dr. Dana Burnett, has been incredibly supportive. From our very first dissertation meeting, he has provided the guidance and strength I have needed to press on, even on days when I was not always certain that I could do it. Dr. Chris Glass has not only been a very supportive member of my dissertation committee, but as my advisor, he has guided my journey through the CCL program. Dr. Alan Switzer's insight into ethical leadership has helped shape the direction of my dissertation, and his ability to look beyond the dissertation into the next phase of my career has been very much appreciated. Lastly, and in many ways most importantly, CCL cohort 12 has played a critical role in my dissertation journey. Leonda, Chad, Stacey, Erika, Liz, Rebecca, Lorraine, Chris, Bill, and Kim are among the brightest and most thoughtful colleagues I have ever known, and I look forward to supporting each and every one of them as they complete their dissertations in the near future.

Without question, I would not have been able to reach this milestone without my Montgomery College family! I have been incredibly fortunate to work with a group of colleagues and friends too numerous to mention who are supportive and caring by nature, and that support and care starts at the top with our president, DeRionne Pollard. Dr. Pollard's grace and guidance have been unwavering and invaluable throughout my doctoral journey. In fact, it was Dr. Pollard who planted the seed that I could one day become a community college

president and that I ought to use my dissertation to begin preparing for that role. This advice, while daunting at the time, has reminded me at the most trying times that I had a purpose and goal in mind that were reachable and part of a masterplan. Thank you for serving on my dissertation committee and so much more. Brad Stewart, my supervisor and mentor, has been encouraging me since writing my letter of recommendation for the CCL program. He has given me the time and latitude I have needed to complete the program while at the same time meeting my responsibilities as a college wide dean. Without his support and that of his administrative manager, Kim McGettigan, who has covered for me last minute and simply made things happen when I was unable to do so, I would not have been able to reach this milestone. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my fellow instructional deans who have taken on additional tasks so that I could have the time to devote to my studies. Sharon, Rodney, John, and Kathy, your support has meant the world to me! There have been three colleagues who have gone beyond the call of duty in guiding me through the dissertation process: Dr. Brenda Williams, Dr. Michelle Scott, and Dr. Jason Rivera. Thank you, Michelle, for helping me think through chapter one and the design of my study. Thank you, Brenda, for helping me to see the bigger picture of a doctoral program and how all the moving parts of a dissertation must come together to form a whole. Thank you, Jason, for everything! Your willingness and ability to answer a question quickly and accurately 24-7, including reviewing my interview questions while on an airport runway, have meant the world to me. I truly would not have been able to complete this journey without your kindness and wisdom. Finally, without the support and daily encouragement of my right-hand, Iris Harrigan, completing my dissertation would not have been possible.

The support and encouragement of my family and friends have sustained me throughout this process. I have felt the love and prayers of Monica, Fred, Jamellah, Malik, Fran, and Gale

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, higher education held a prominent role in the nation's policy agenda as the

United States became increasingly aware that most residents need at least some college

education in order to obtain decent jobs with family-sustaining wages (Bailey, Jaggars, &

Jenkins, 2015). In these times of increased scrutiny to produce more college-educated people

ready to enter the workforce, college leaders are facing a climate that is rampant with financial

constraints, greater demands from stakeholders, and governmental mandates. Despite these

circumstances, higher education leaders must be mindful that colleges and universities hold a

remarkable responsibility of providing a solid educational foundation for their students, which

includes upholding high academic and ethical standards (de Russy & Langbert, 2005).

For today's community college presidents, leading one of the nation's more than 1,100

two-year institutions poses significant challenges, particularly in an era when there is heightened

sensitivity to the costs to educate and time to completion. Community colleges provide access to

higher education for almost half of the nation's undergraduates, over 10 million students per year

(Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). Further, budget constraints, unfunded mandates, and

increased scrutiny pose ethical dilemmas for today's community college leaders (Wallin, 2007).

Moreover, scholars report that there has been an increase in unethical behavior in higher

education (Hellmich, 2007; Wood & Nevarez, 2014), with many leaders being charged with

corruption and inappropriate conduct (de Russy & Langbert, 2005). For college presidents,

effective decision-making necessitates the ability to strike a balance between stakeholder needs

and college resources, mission, vision, and values, which stem from one's personal ethical

perspective (Mitchell, 2012). As leaders of higher education institutions entrusted with the

academic and social development of students, it is critical that community college presidents exude integrity, fairness, openness, and sound, moral judgement (Wallin, 2007).

Community colleges, with their mission of providing open access, affordability and convenient locations, play a critical role in educating diverse students who might otherwise not have an opportunity for postsecondary education (Hagedorn, 2010; Phillippe & Gonzalez, 2005). As such, according to the American Association of Community College's (AACC) *Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future,* leading a 21st century community college requires restructuring the community college and committing to the "Three Rs":

- redesigning students' academic experiences;

- reinventing institutional roles; and

- resetting the structure to provide incentives for student and institutional achievement (AACC, 2012).

These requirements dictate an emphasis on strong ethical decision-making processes which are one of the essential skills of a successful leader (Wood & Nevarez, 2010).

While many community college presidents have maintained their commitment to the community college mission, many recent student success initiatives have become worrisome to community college leaders because they are often connected to completion rates, limited resources, and immense pressure from state and national policymakers to dramatically increase the number of degrees and certificates (Baker, 2012). As such, community college chief executive officers (CEOs) and other leaders often encounter challenges that necessitate that they carefully construct and develop their professional ethical identities in order to lead effectually (Vaughn, 2000; Wood & Nevarez, 2014). For the purposes of this study, CEO and president will

be used interchangeably. Further, as leaders of today's community colleges, it is imperative that one's ethical behavior and identity intersect with one's commitment to the community college mission. Thus, according to Kelley and Chang (2007), "Researchers believe that improving ethical behavior in higher education is essential to the health of our university and community college system" (p. 424).

The role of ethical leadership in community college presidents is of particular concern (Anderson, Harbour, & Davies, 2007; Davis, 2007; Mitchell, 2012; Wallin, 2007; Wood & Nevarez, 2014), especially given the added pressure on community colleges to increase completion rates for student populations that have historically underperformed academically. In fact, many educators are concerned that the tenets of higher education have been eclipsed by administrative objectives pertaining to completion, budget constraints, enrollment projections, fundraising and political agendas (Kelly & Chang, 2007), each of which increases the responsibility of community college CEOs to demonstrate ethical decision-making. In 2005, AACC introduced a code of ethics for community college CEOs, and in 2012, AACC partnered with the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) to address the gap in the leadership pipeline for community college presidents (AACC, 2012).

At a time when AACC and others have announced that there is a shortage of available candidates ready to assume leadership positions in the community college, especially the presidency (ACCT, 2013; O'Banion, 2007), community colleges have been under increased scrutiny to produce more college graduates expeditiously and efficiently. According to AACC, approximately 75 percent of current community college CEOs who responded to a 2012 survey of affiliated institutions plans to retire within the next 10 years (ACCT, 2013). Moreover, in 2015 Achieving the Dream (ATD), a national reform network dedicated to improving

community college student success, acknowledged that in the next five years 40 percent of college presidents will retire. Thus, partnering with The Aspen Institute, ATD is helping to prevent a potential gap in leadership by creating curriculum modules focused on strategies that address the changing constraints on the role of college presidents (Achieving the Dream, 2015a).

Description of the Problem

According to AACC, community colleges serve almost half of all undergraduates in the United States (AACC, 2015b). As the nation's affordable pathway to a college education, community colleges have been under tremendous scrutiny to increase student transfers, produce more graduates, and award more certificates (Altstadt, 2012). Additionally, national conversations regarding the efficacy of developmental education, guided pathways, college and career readiness, performance-based funding, and completion rates have garnered the attention of the National Governors' Association (NGA), special interest groups, and not-for-profit organizations. Thus, higher education leaders, public policy makers, advocacy organizations, and education foundations have aggressively pursued strategies to increase college completion rates (Altstadt, 2012). Moreover, according to President Obama,

> In the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow
> twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience. We will not fill those jobs – or keep
> those jobs on our shores – without the training offered by community colleges (White
> House, 2014, p. 1).

In response to increased global competition and the nation's workforce demands, the Obama administration set two national goals: "by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world, and community colleges will produce an additional

5 million graduates" ("Building American Skills, 2014, p. 1). Meeting these national completion benchmarks has created a sense of urgency for today's community college presidents and leaders.

Given that only 29.2 percent of two-year college students graduate within three-years (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2010), students' college readiness and their ability to complete are at question. College readiness is defined by several criteria: a) a student's ability to enroll in a postsecondary institution, b) take credit-level courses the first year, c) earn passing grades, and d) persist to educational goals (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2012). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), one-third of students attending four-year institutions, and 42 percent of students at two-year institutions, enroll in remedial education courses. Community college students account for over 45 percent of all postsecondary students in the United States (AACC, 2014), and it is estimated that at least two thirds of community college students are unable to engage in college-level work in at least one subject area (Bailey, 2009).

While college and career readiness programs have been around for the last fifty years, (Arnold, Lu & Armstrong, 2012), they have garnered additional attention recently as states have increased their postsecondary completion efforts in response to the completion agenda. Nationally, organizations such as Complete College America, Jobs for the Future, Lumina Foundation, and the Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success, among others, have placed additional pressure on two-and-four-year institutions to address the issue of lack of preparedness in today's high school graduates. The National High School Center (2013b), supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, identified more than 70 organizations that address college and career readiness. Fifty-six percent of the organizations acknowledge the importance of greater alignment between secondary and postsecondary benchmarks (National High School

Center, 2013a). States such as California (Early Assessment Program) and Florida (Florida

Education and Training Placement Information Program) have adopted statewide programs to

support their state's efforts to assess readiness. Kentucky (Postsecondary Education

Improvement Act of 1997) and Maryland (College and Career Readiness and College

Completion Act of 2013) have adopted accountability legislature. Maryland's College and

Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013 was enacted in July of 2013 to address

completion issues in the state (Fain, 2014). Community college presidents are aware of these

constraints and must be proactive in addressing them responsibly and ethically.

Scholars and educators are concerned that there is a void in ethical leadership, leaving

higher education institutions, among others, bereft of highly capable leaders who are equipped to

successfully meet the demands and responsibilities of ensuring effective, ethical leadership in the

nation's colleges and universities (de Russy & Langbert, 2005; Wood & Nevarez, 2014). Wallin

(2007) stressed the significance of ethical leadership in community college presidents, noting

that a call for ethical leadership in today's community college presidents is needed. Wallin

(2007) concluded that leadership in community colleges and universities is under intense

scrutiny to respond to ethical issues often exacerbated by budget constraints, socioeconomic

influences, demographic trends and institutional demands that pose ethical challenges. Therefore,

there is a need for an increased understanding of how community college presidents execute

ethical decision-making and the characteristics of strong, ethical leadership in today's

community colleges.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to examine how community college

presidents execute ethical leadership in responding to institutional policy implications stemming

from the completion agenda. This study explored the ethical constructs Achieving the Dream (ATD) community college presidents operationalized as they employed decision-making processes related to implementing completion agenda policies at their institutions. These ethical constructs are based upon transformational and charismatic leadership theories (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005; Diaz-Saenz, 2011) which posits that CEOs would be better able to demonstrate transformational leadership because they establish their organization's mission and vision; they hold the highest leadership level in the organization, and have the most autonomy in the organization (Diaz-Saenz, 2011).

Research Questions

Given that a growing body of research already exists on the outcomes of the completion agenda, I was interested in community college presidents' ethical decision-making processes regarding completion agenda initiatives. Thus the research questions for this study included:

1. How do community college presidents describe ethical leadership? (Wood & Nevarez, 2014)

2. How do community college presidents execute ethical decision-making as it relates to student success initiatives stemming from the completion agenda? (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005)

3. What is the role of ethical leadership in establishing policies that stem from the completion agenda? (Mitchell, 2012; Starrat, 2004)

Significance of Study

Although this study was focused on community college presidents' ethical leadership in one Mid-Atlantic state, the results of this study could potentially assist community college

governing boards across the nation and community college associations in ensuring that CEOs execute ethical leadership when implementing higher education policy. Goldrick-Rab and Shaw (2007) reported that there is a disconnection between policymakers and those responsible for implementing higher education policy. They also noted that there is a gap in the literature on higher education policy implementation at the local level. As such, there are ethical issues for community college presidents who must implement policies that stem from legislation of which they may or may not agree or understand.

Further, community college management and leadership have been widely discussed in the last decade due to the anticipated retirements of senior level administrators, particularly presidents and chief academic officers (CAO) around the nation. According to O'Banion (2007), between 2007 and 2012, almost half (about 600) of community college presidents and one fourth of CAOs (approximately 900) will have retired. Unlike baccalaureate institutions, community college administrative leaders may not necessarily be academics: they are most often managers with the responsibility of responding to state legislatures, the local community and boards of trustees (Eddy, 2013). As such, community colleges are often bureaucratic (Levin, 1998), and decision-making authority almost always rests with senior-level college administrators (Eddy, 2013). Thus, how to respond to these challenges in an ethical manner is of particular importance to community college CEOs.

Overview of Methodology

The guiding methodology for this study was an intrinsic, descriptive, multiple case study using qualitative inquiry which I chose because I was interested in knowing more about a particular situation and describing its phenomenon in context (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). This study was based on a constructivist paradigm that claims that truth is dependent upon one's

perceptions and is relative (Yin, 2003). The case was developed in collaboration with the researcher and study participants, and presented to inform, engage, and invite the reader to participate in case discovery (Stake, 1995). According to Maxwell (2005), "The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (p. 22). Further, the primary mode a researcher can utilize to investigate an educational program, institution or process is through an analysis of the experiences of individuals involved in that program or institution (Seidman, 2013). As such, interviewing community college presidents allowed me to gather thick, personalized information (Mason, 2002). In semi-structured interviews, the researcher investigates the subject matter through pre-determined and flexible open-ended questions. In addition, the researcher poses follow-up questions to elicit even deeper understanding of themes of interest (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The justification for this research method was based on the need for qualitative researchers to add to the body of literature by exploring the experiences and stories of leaders on the path toward productive workplace ethical identity development (Harbour, Anderson, & Davies, 2007). This dissertation analyzed relevant documents including accreditation reports; vision, mission and values statements; strategic plans; and online presence including social media and presidential websites.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to select appropriate participants for the study. Purposeful sampling involves establishing specific criteria prior to conducting interviews to determine the most appropriate candidates (Patton, 2002). The study participants were three Achieving the Dream (ATD) community college presidents from the same Mid-Atlantic state. A Mid-Atlantic state was chosen because it passed state legislation in 2013 that legally requires its state

community colleges take action to increase completion rates. All of the institutions are considered large and suburban, with credit and continuing education student enrollment ranging from nearly 40,000 to over 60,000. Currently, there are more than 200 community colleges and institutions in 36 states throughout the nation participating in the Achieving the Dream (ATD) National Reform Network (ATD, 2015). Since 2004, as part of an initiative funded by Lumina Foundation and seven other founding partner organizations, ATD has served as an independent, national nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing student success and advancing completion rates.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study sought to privilege the voices of community college presidents from three ATD institutions in the same Mid-Atlantic state where completion agenda legislation has recently been passed. This study did not address whether or not the completion agenda has had an impact upon the state or the particular institution. This study was delimited to the examination of ethical leadership, especially as it pertained to implementing policies stemming from the state's completion legislation.

Assumptions

In this study, it was assumed that because the three institutions selected are a part of the ATD network, the presidents and their institutions have been heavily engaged in student success and completion initiatives. It was also assumed that as community college presidents, ethical leadership is paramount to effectively running their institutions. It was further assumed that because of these student success and completion initiatives, the presidents have had to implore ethical-decision-making processes.

Definition of Key Terminology

Achieving the Dream (ATD). ATD refers to the nonprofit organization "conceived as an initiative in 2004 by Lumina Foundation and seven founding partner organizations. Achieving the Dream (ATD) now leads the most comprehensive non-governmental reform movement for student success in higher education history" (AACC, 2015b).

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) – AACC refers to the advocacy organization for the U.S.'s community colleges. AACC represents approximately 1,100 associate degree-granting and two year institutions and more than 12 million students (AACC, 2015a).

The Aspen Institute – The Aspen Institute refers to the Washington, DC based educational and policy studies organization dedicated to fostering educational leadership based on "enduring values" and providing a nonpartisan platform for addressing critical issues (The Aspen Institute, 2015).

Charismatic Leadership. Charismatic leadership refers to leaders who "arouse enthusiasm and commitment in followers by articulating a compelling vision and increasing follower confidence about achieving it (Yukl, 2013, p. 335).

College Readiness. College readiness refers to a "student's capacity to enroll at a postsecondary institution, take credit-bearing classes beginning in the first year, earn passing grades in courses, and persist to his or her educational goals" (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2012, p. 1).

Completion Agenda. Completion agenda refers to a movement begun by the Lumina Foundation for Education in 2003-2004 to address student success and completion rates in the nation's community colleges (McClenney, 2013).

Ethic of care. Ethic of care refers to "virtues of care, connection, trust, and affirmation" (Wood & Nevarez, 2014, p. 10).

Ethic of critique. Ethic of critique refers to "advocating for the interests, needs, and outcomes for those who have been historically underrepresented and underserved in education" (Wood & Nevarez, 2014, p. 10).

Ethic of justice. Ethic of justice refers to a "decision-making paradigm that relies upon existing rules, codes, and policies to determine the appropriate course of action in a given circumstance" (Wood & Nevarez, 2014, p. 10).

Ethic of local community. Ethic of local community refers to seeking "the 'greatest good' for the local community served by the community college" (Wood & Nevarez, 2014, p. 10).

Ethical Decision-Making Process. Ethical decision-making process refers to identifying an ethical problem, gathering data, conceptualizing and evaluating alternative courses of action, and implementing a plan of action (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Ethical Dilemma. Ethical dilemma refers to situations with conflicting moral consequences (Krishnakumar & Rymph, 2011).

Ethical Leadership. Ethical leadership refers to the "demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers thorough two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005, p. 120).

Ethics. Ethics refers to the "underlying beliefs, assumptions, principles, and values that support a moral way of life" (Starrat, 2004, p. 5).

*Integrity***.** Integrity refers to one's behavior being consistent with one's espoused values and personal concepts of being honest, ethical, and trustworthy (Yukl, 2013).

Mid-Atlantic State. Mid-Atlantic state is the pseudonym for the location of the participants' community colleges.

*Morality***.** Morality refers to living and embodying ethical beliefs, values and commitments (Starrat, 2004).

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership refers to leadership that "appeals to the moral values of followers in an attempt to raise their consciousness about ethical issues and to mobilize their energy and resources to reform institutions" (Yukl, 2013, p. 321).

Summary

Harbour and Smith's (2015) analysis of the completion agenda as outlined in AACC's *Reclaiming the American Dream* asserted that the completion agenda overemphasizes economic vitality and downplays student learning and development. In their examination of the support and criticism of the policy, they concluded the following: a) a focus on completion instead of student learning is short-sighted and misguided; b) there is no consensus on the purposes that should guide the completion agenda; and c) the projection goals for the completion agenda are desirable but not realistic, particularly when factoring at-risk students. Belfied, Crosta, and Jenkins (2014) asserted that community colleges must address the fiduciary responsibility and institutional efficiency necessary to implement completion agenda goals. They further concluded that there has been limited research on the costs associated with the additional resources needed to implement completion reform (Belfied, Crosta, & Jenkins, 2014). Given that community college presidents are committed to the mission of affordable, open access education for even the most underprepared students, scholars have asserted that an emphasis on executing ethical leadership

and ethical decision-making is needed. Thus, this study attempted to understand how

community college presidents execute ethical leadership in the face of the considerable

challenges associated with implementing the completion agenda.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

To investigate how Achieving the Dream (ATD) community college presidents execute ethical leadership in responding to institutional policy implications stemming from the completion agenda, an analysis of the following subtopics is provided: a) higher education policy, b) the completion agenda, c) community college presidential leadership, d) and ethical leadership and decision-making. To locate the relevant literature, the following search terms were used: the completion agenda, community colleges and the completion agenda, Achieving the Dream, higher education policy, community college policy implementation, community college presidential leadership, ethical leadership, and ethical decision-making. Search terms were used independently and combined. Research was conducted using the following Old Dominion University library databases: Education Research Complete, Education Full Text, ERIC, Proquest Dissertations and Theses at Old Dominion, and Proquest Dissertations and Theses Global. Searches were conducted between May of 2014 and January 2016.

Higher Education Policy

The 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education and the G.I. Bill of 1944 established a significant shift in the United States' assumptions of who should attend college (Hutcheson, 2007). The Truman Commission proposed educating college students broadly in general education and improving college teaching as solutions to educating more Americans (Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Hutcheson, 2007). General education is characterized as the standard education that college students should have; the commission identified the first two years of college as essential to providing this education and emphasized the role of community colleges (Hutcheson, 2007). While the report generated a mixed range of responses from intellectuals and

stakeholders regarding its efficacy and generated healthy debate over access, policy and philosophy (Gilbert & Heller, 2013), it lacked the political clout and precedent to do more at that time than foster a national dialogue on higher education policy (Hutchenson, 2002; Thelin, 2004).

Higher education policy has evolved from public policies that influence the ways in which colleges are funded and students pay for their education to in the last half century a focus on college preparation, access and degree completion (St. John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). While the federal government has the responsibility of regulating financial aid, states are responsible for educating their residents and to a lesser degree local communities share in this responsibility (St. John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). Expanding the educational attainment of the U.S. population is a federal priority (St. John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2013; Building American Skills, 2014). As such, educational-attainment studies rely on state demographic, academic preparation, and postsecondary attainment data; and the majority of recent federal research in higher education has focused on degree attainment (St. John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2013).

In examining sociological frameworks for higher education policy research, Bastedo (2007) asserted that students and researchers are grappling with "new and compelling frameworks" (p. 295) to explain higher education policy dynamics. As such, he posited that sociological and organizational theories could fill the gap in understanding higher education policy. He also noted that policy process theories, rooted in political science, can also be used to examine the impact of organizational environments, structures and behaviors on organizational decision-making, as opposed to merely examining interactions between interest groups and individual actors. Bastedo (2007) examined the policymaking environment for higher education

organizations and noted their variances, including individual and organizational capacity, the complex nature of technical and organizational environments due to the multiple constituencies higher education must serve (i.e. parents, students, alumni, trustees, state board, governors and legislatures). Bastedo (2007) also pointed out that higher education institutions must also respond to competing environmental demands which include increasing efficiency and access, lowering costs, and improving quality. Bastedo (2007) focused on four areas of policy in his examination of how power and authority play important roles in higher education: a) policy as strategy, b) policy as entrepreneurship, c) policy as symbolic action, and d) policy as logic.

Jones, Ewell, & McGuinness (1998) examined the changing nature of higher education policy and established a research agenda for the newly formed National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (NCPPHE). They argued the need to adopt a broader definition of higher education that recognizes that postsecondary education is likely to include "bites," which are beyond courses but smaller than programs, to address the nation's higher education needs. They also called for NCPPHE to formulate a public agenda, action-research, policy tools, and an ability to analyze inevitable higher education policy fads. Their research paper focused on affirming that the higher education policy environment is changing and there are many outdated policy assumptions, identifying issues and questions that must be addressed, and suggesting activities that could best be incorporated into the scope of work of NCPPHE. In writing their report, the authors concentrated on higher education policy implications for individuals, employers, and society. In considering these groups, their research suggested the need for policy framework that is more focused on learners and less focused on learner providers.

In discussing policy structure, Jones, Ewell, and McGuinness (1998) addressed the role of federal grant funding in influencing higher education policy. They acknowledged that

postsecondary education systems are the result of 50 distinctive state cultures. As such, they

posited that states have relied upon seven common tools in dealing with higher education policy:

a) Mission and program approval: determining what institutions can and cannot do; b)

Governance: allocating decision-making authority; c) Regulation: prescribing 'how' providers

should go about their business; d) Financing and resource allocation: creating incentives and

subsidies for action; e) Quality assurance: providing accountability and consumer protection; f)

Reporting requirements: creating an information base for decision-making; and g) Setting public

priorities: explicit agendas for action. Jones, Ewell, and McGuinness (1998) also addressed the

critical need for policy leadership, given that separate policy initiatives often work at cross-

purposes, which have led to an overreliance on "market forces as an alternative to an unworkable

policy framework" (p. 25). Yet, as the authors mentioned, there are consequences to this

approach, including emphasizing higher education as a private good instead of a public good.

A decade later in 2008, the NCPPHE co-issued a report with Public Agenda where they

conducted a qualitative study of more than two dozen college and university presidents,

including public and private institutions and two and four-year schools, on their perceptions of

costs, access and quality in higher education. In their report, they concluded that higher

education leaders have a significantly differing definition of the problem of higher education

than the general public and other leadership groups (Immerwahr, Johnson, & Gasbarra, 2008).

They further concluded that increasing costs of higher education, providing access to new

generations of students with differing needs, and improving and maintaining quality education

and being held accountable for that quality are of greatest concerns to presidents (Immerwahr,

Johnson, & Gasbarra, 2008). Recommended solutions to these challenges, most of which touch

upon higher education policy, were: a) increasing higher education funding through government

reinvestment and reprioritization, b) improving pre-k -12 education, c) developing private sector partnerships, d) providing more financial aid and increasing tuition and fees, e) increasing the role of community colleges by educating more students at reduced costs, and f) adopting voluntary accountability measures.

Natow (2015), in a qualitative case study of 55 policy and higher education and policy actors, examined how proximity to Washington, DC has influenced higher education policymaking. The purpose of the study was to research which policy actors influence higher education rulemaking processes and to investigate the type of influence they have. The author noted that U.S. higher education rulemaking stems from the Department of Education's oversight of such entities such as federal financial aid derived from the Higher Education Act and its various amendments. Natow's research concluded that the less prominent and the more technical the issue, the less influential the actor (department, career bureaucrats, specialized interest groups). However, the more prominent and easily understood the issue (i.e., the completion agenda) the more influential the actor (political branches, political appointees, and well-resourced interest groups).

The author's theoretical framework included bureaucracy theory and agency capture theory. Bureaucratic policy theory posits that bureaucracies and individual bureaucrats have discretion in performing their official tasks. Therefore, they exert considerable authority in policy and operations and make decisions that advance their personal interests as well as their departments. Agency capture theory posits that certain regulated entities have considerable influence over the government agencies that are supposed to regulate them; as such, these regulated entities yield their power to persuade agencies to promote policies that benefit their interests. The author's research added to the higher education and bureaucratic policy body of

literature by addressing actors' different levels of participation during various stages of the rulemaking process.

Higher Education Policy and Community Colleges

U.S. community colleges originated as neighborhood schools and were subsequently developed by state plans (Cohen, 2014). The nation's first and oldest existing two-year college, Joliet Junior College in Illinois, was founded in 1901 and existed during a time when there was very little federal government involvement (Cohen, 2014). As the role of junior, two-year and community colleges has expanded over time, these institutions are now located within every state, providing vocational and occupational training, basic skills development, special interest courses and programs, and the first two years of a baccalaureate degree (Cohen, 2014). At the end of World War II, these institutions expanded their reach due to widespread anticipation that community colleges would stimulate the economy, strengthen democracy, and alleviate racial and class conflict (Meier, 2008). Moreover, postwar insurgence of community colleges was tied to federal public policy (Meier, 2013).

Gilbert and Heller's (2013) analysis of the 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education (PCHE) report focused on improving equity and college access, and increasing the role of community colleges. Focusing on these two areas, the authors reviewed the trajectory of higher education policy thinking from the end of World War II to the present and drew conclusions about the extent of the report's implementation in higher education today. They found that community colleges have continued to charge tuition (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Provasnik & Plantry, 2008), despite the Commission's recommendation to have free tuition through grade 14 (PCHE, 1947). However, aside from tuition, the authors concluded that the Commission's vision for community college expansion in the areas of access and equity has been

realized in five areas: a) community colleges have become locally focused within state systems of higher education, b) the number of community colleges and students across the nation has increased exponentially and colleges are primarily state supported, c) statewide planning in relation to new community colleges and state systems of higher education have formed, d) vocational education through federal funding has been emphasized, and e) efforts to enact policies that benefit community colleges and ongoing rhetoric in support of community colleges has been consistent in the Obama administration. In 2009, President Obama established the American Graduation Initiative: Stronger American Skills through Community Colleges to strengthen and reform community colleges across the nation. According to President Obama:

> Not since the passage of the original GI Bill and the work of President Truman's Commission on Higher Education – which helped double the number of community colleges and increase by seven fold enrollment in those colleges – have we taken such a historic step on behalf of community college in America….Now is the time to build a firmer, stronger foundation for growth that will not only withstand future economic storms, but one that helps us thrive and compete in a global economy. It's time to reform our community colleges so that they provide Americans of all ages a chance to learn the skills and knowledge necessary to compete for the jobs of the future (White House, 2009, para. 4-5).

State policymaking and higher education reform. The Higher Education Act of 1965 was instrumental in laying the groundwork for coordinated state policymaking regarding higher education. As a result, in the late 1960s considerable legislation was passed in several states that established state higher education coordinating systems as a way to qualify for federal aid (Cohen, 2014). Perna, Finney, and Rorison, (2014) provided a comprehensive framework for

understanding the ways in which state policy may positively impact higher education attainment and closing the achievement gap across groups of disadvantaged students. They examined the role of state government structure in higher education and the role of public policy levers and the "centrality of context," (p. 35) which are the historical, demographic, economic, political and other characteristics that influence state policymaking. Firstly, in analyzing the role of state government structures, the authors established the relationship between society's understanding of higher education performance and that of higher education institutions' interest in preserving their autonomy. In doing so, they provided the context for state higher education governance systems.

Secondly, in discussing the role of public policy levers, Perna, Finney, and Rorison (2014) analyzed how the economic theory of human capital has influenced higher education public policy. According to the authors, governments use the public policy lever to "adapt the higher education market to realize improved higher educational attainment" (p. 32). Thus, in its simplest form the authors contended that the higher education market is made up of consumers (students and their families), sellers (colleges and universities), and goods and services (degrees and certificates). Although the U.S. higher education system lacks centralized management, federal and state governments have established public policies that influence the structure and design of the higher education market. Thirdly, in discussing the centrality of context, the authors contended that the relationship between higher education performance and public policy cannot be comprehended without considering state context. This is best illustrated by investigating the political forces that lead to state adoption of particular higher education policies such as those stemming from the completion agenda.

U.S. Higher Education Completion Policies and Initiatives

Scholars, the federal government, and national associations have called for an increased emphasis for improved higher education accountability systems (Heller, 2001; Lombardi & Capaldi, 1996; Zumeta, 2001). While much of the accountability efforts have focused on performance-based funding (PBF) (Friedel, Thornton, D'Amico, & Katsinas, 2013), higher education leaders, public policy makers, advocacy organizations, and education foundations have aggressively pursued strategies to increase college completion rates (Altstadt, 2012; Russell, 2011). In 2009, one such advocacy organization, Complete College America (CCA), contacted governors throughout the United States and requested that they join their Alliance of States network dedicated to reforming developmental education and increasing college completion rates (CCA, 2013). Figure 1 illustrates the CCA 33 participating states and District of Columbia by U.S. census region.

Figure 1. Complete College America 33 Participating States and District of Columbia by U.S. Census Regions

Northeast	Midwest	West	South
Connecticut	Illinois	Colorado	Arkansas
DC	Indiana	Hawaii	Florida
Maine	Missouri	Idaho	Georgia
Massachusetts	Ohio	Minnesota	Kentucky
Rhode Island	South Dakota	Montana	Louisiana
Pennsylvania	Wisconsin	Oregon	Maryland
Vermont		Nevada	Mississippi
		New Mexico	Oklahoma
		Utah	Tennessee
		Wyoming	Texas
			West Virginia

In recent years, the federal government and Obama administration have focused their attention on college completion rates. Moreover, the U.S. higher education system has more heavily emphasized completion initiatives and policies since President Obama announced at his February 24, 2009 joint session that the U.S. was significantly behind its global counterparts in degree attainment (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Kelly & Schneider, 2012; Russell, 2011). As an example, in 2009 the Obama Administration recommended replacing the College Access Challenge Grant with a more comprehensive College Access and Completion Fund to support

states' efforts in improving completion rates of their low-income students (Moltz, 2009).

Likewise, in March 2011, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) published the College

Completion Toolkit to provide states guidelines on promising strategies to improve completion

rates (Russell, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The toolkit presented several cost

effective strategies for governors to consider. When unveiled by Vice President Biden, the

toolkit included several additional federally funded grant opportunities to support completion.

These grants included the $123 million First in the World incentive program which funds

programs that bolster completion, accelerate learning, and keep tuition low as well as the College

Completion Incentive Grant program that funds states and institutions who undertake systemic

reforms to increase college graduation rates (Russell, 2011).

     The Obama administration's support of completion initiatives and policies has sparked a

more concentrated effort to increase student success and graduation rates across the nation. Over

the last several years, an unusually large number of organizations have become involved with the

completion agenda's goal of dramatically increasing the number of U.S. adults with a

postsecondary credential (Russell, 2011). Their focus has been not only on increasing

institutional graduation rates but also on meeting state and national attainment goals (Hauptman,

2012; Russel, 2011). Figure 2 illustrates major U.S. college completion initiatives with statewide

involvement (Russell, 2011).

Figure 2. Major U.S. College Completion Initiatives with Statewide Involvement

Initiative	Sponsors/Funders	Goals	States Involved
Access to Success	Lumina Foundation; Gates Foundation	Eliminate access and graduation gaps for low-income and minority students	CA, CT, FL, HI, KY, MD, MO, MS, MT, NC, NY, RI, SD, TN, WI
Achieving the Dream (ATD)	Lumina Foundation; More than 20 funders currently	Increase community college student success and completion rates, particularly low-income and students of color	State policy teams in AK, CT, FL, HI, IN, MA, MI, NC, NM, OH, OK, PA, SC, TX, VA, WA
College Completion Agenda	College Board; National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL); Excelencia in Education; & National Council of La Raza	Increase proportion of 25-34 year olds with associate degree or higher to 55% by 2025	CA, CO,FL, ID, MA, MD, NC, NM, NY, RI, TN, TX, VA, WV
Completion by Design	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Significantly increase completion and graduation rates	FL, NC, OH See Figure 1
Complete College America	Carnegie Corporation; Lumina Foundation; Gates Foundation; Kellogg Foundation; Ford Foundation	Significantly increase number of Americans with college degree or credential and to close achievement gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations	

The Completion Agenda

The completion agenda (also referred to as the completion reform movement) is described as a movement led by federal and state policy makers to dramatically increase the number of students graduating from U.S. colleges and universities (Humphreys, 2012; Walters, 2012). As such, the nation's colleges and universities have undergone a shift from providing access to a focus on completion (Kelly & Schneider, 2012). The completion agenda calls on colleges, universities, and policymakers to improve the rate at which students earn their degrees (Kelly & Schneider, 2012). Although not the focus of this study, underlying many completion agenda initiatives has been an emphasis on performance-based funding (PBF).

PBF and the completion agenda. Controversy surrounding performance based funding (PBF) has persisted at the state and national level for the last three decades, as many states have struggled with whether or not to adopt, implement, abandon, or revise funding efforts that tie state resources for higher education to an institution's outcomes (Jones, 2012). Under PBF policies, states fund colleges and universities based on their completion rates such as graduation, transfer or employment, not just enrollments (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). Not surprisingly, community colleges, as the nation's affordable pathway to a college education, have been under additional scrutiny to bolster completion by increasing student transfers, producing more graduates, and awarding more certificates (Altstadt, 2012) while at the same time facing budget constraints.

In times of economic uncertainty, funding completion efforts has become challenging for many states who struggle to meet the needs of their students due to a decline in resources (National Governors Association and the National Association of State Budget Officers, 2012). Further, the National Governor's Association's (NGA) Complete to Compete lauds PBF, noting

that a strong accountability system with relevant metrics is necessary to advance the completion

agenda (Walters, 2012). Complete to Compete was a U.S. college completion initiative from

2010-2011 sponsored by the NGA designed to support policy development aimed at increasing

college completion (Russell, 2011). According to Walters (2012), it is at the state level where the

most pressure can be applied to advance the completion agenda due to PBF. Walters (2012)

pointed to gains in Ohio, Texas and Tennessee as examples of successful completion agenda

initiatives. He also noted that Maryland and Virginia have made promising efforts towards

addressing completion rates. However, because they have not officially adopted "pressure-

formula approaches," (p. 12) they have not been identified as successful models in the reform

movement (Walters, 2012).

   Special interest and not-for-profit influence on the completion agenda. President

Obama and philanthropic and policy organizations have called for increased completion rates so

that the United States resumes leading the world in the number of higher education degrees for

its population (Perna & Finney, 2014). As noted earlier, Complete College America (CCA), a

national nonprofit organization established in 2009 to increase educational attainment in the

U.S., is the most recognized organization in the completion agenda. CCA rose to prominence for

several reasons, including the fact that their principal agenda has been adopted by the U.S.

Department of Education (2011). Further, as President Obama's White House Completion

Initiative and economic experts continue to examine the country's higher education arena and

workforce needs, community colleges are being urged by advocacy organizations, such as the

Lumina Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to prepare students more quickly

and efficiently for jobs or to transfer to baccalaureate institutions (Harnisch, 2011).

As noted above, the NGA selected Complete to Compete as its major policy initiative for 2010-11. Complete to Compete was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, and USA Funds. Hauptman (2012) pointed out the influence of special interest groups like Jobs for the Future (JFF) and others in determining U.S. attainment goals because of a shift in focus from access to completion rates. However, this emphasis on completion rates as the major premise to increasing attainment could result in reduced quality of education or increased selectivity in students (Hauptman, 2012). Further, Walters (2012) argued that the completion agenda is primarily focused on governors, state policy leaders, legislators, and boards of higher education as the primary responsible parties; thus the interference of special interest groups and non-profit organizations is not without its challenges.

Achieving the dream and the completion agenda. Achieving the Dream (ATD) is a national reform movement committed to systemic change in the nation's community colleges, with the ultimate objective of increasing student success and completion, especially among disadvantaged students (Mayer, et al., 2014). The Lumina Foundation for Education, along with seven other partner institutions, created Achieving the Dream (ATD) in 2003-2004 as the catalyst for this movement (Mayer et al, 2014; McClenney, 2013). The movement has since been joined by numerous organizations and foundations, with ATD now reaching over 200 institutions in 35 states and the District of Columbia (Achieving the Dream, 2015). ATD's strategies in advancing the completion agenda include coaching for transformation, the role of boards, an inventory of policies and practices, transformative culture, and promising interventions (McClenney, 2013). ATD boasts more than 100 leadership and data coaches and advisors, 15 state policy teams, and numerous partners and investors assisting more than four

million community college students with a greater opportunity of earning a credential and realizing economic opportunities (ATD, 2015).

MDRC, a nonpartisan, nonprofit social policy and education research organization, and the Community College Research Center (CCRC) have published numerous reports on ATD and the completion agenda. Two MDRC and CCRC joint reports of significance, *Turning the Tide: Five Years of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges* (2011) and *Moving Ahead with Institutional Change: Lessons from the First Round of Achieving the Dream Community Colleges* (2014), document the implementation and progress of the first 26 colleges to join ATD in 2004-2005, referred to as the "Round 1" colleges (Mayer et al., 2014). *Turing the Tide* tracked the progress of the Round 1 colleges through spring 2009 and concluded the following:

- Four out of five Round 1 colleges adopted practices associated with a moderate to strong culture of evidence. Conversely, about one-fifth of the colleges still struggled to implement many of the initiative's recommended practices, hindered primarily by weak institutional research capacity.

- Colleges that made the greatest strides shared several key characteristics, including broad-based involvement of college administrators, faculty, and staff; strong institutional research departments that produced accessible reports on student achievement; regular evaluations of their programs; and scale-up of successful programs.

- Colleges instituted a wide range of strategies to improve student achievement, but a majority of them remained small in scale. However, a majority of these reforms reached less than 10 percent of their intended target populations.

- Achieving the Dream had an important influence on most colleges. Representatives from three-fourths of the colleges said that the initiative had at least some influence on their development of a culture of evidence.

- Trends in student outcomes remained relatively unchanged, with a few exceptions (Rutschow et al. 2011, p. iii).

Moving Ahead (2014), the final report from MDRC and CCRC on the Round 1 colleges, extends *Turning the Tide* by analyzing institution-wide student outcomes during the latter period of the five-year implementation and exploring variations in student outcome trends and reanalyzing implementation data to facilitate informing other institutions in the reform movement (Mayer et al., 2014). Overall, their report concluded that on average, student outcome trends remained stable institution-wide, including during the recession in late 2007 (Mayer et al., 2014). However, they concluded that three colleges surpassed the others in advances in multiple indicators of student success, including the following:

- Each college focused on specific student subgroups, and each coordinated multiple reform efforts around their chosen subgroup.

- In later years, after gaining experience with the initial subgroups, each college expanded its new practices in order to reach larger groups of students and faculty.

- One college used its reaccreditation process to help coordinate its reform efforts and to work toward establishing a common set of goals (Mayer et al., 2014, p. ES-2).

Developmental education and the completion agenda. Developmental education is reported to be one of the most challenging issues facing community colleges (Bailey & Cho, 2010; Crisp & Delgado, 2014; Jaggars & Hodara, 2013; Rutschow & Schneider, 2011). Developmental students are those who are determined to need at least one course in remedial

English, reading or mathematics as determined by performance on placement exams such as

COMPASS or ACCUPLACER (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 61 percent of students enrolled in

public, two-year institutions between 1992 and 2000 completed at least one developmental

education course (Parsad, Lewis, & Green, 2003). Recent research indicates that developmental

education has had limited success (Bailey, 2009). Despite the fact that in the last two decades

various forms of developmental education programs have attempted to address the needs of the

underprepared (Kozeracki, 2005; Moss & Yeaton, 2006), only 28 percent of college students

enrolled in developmental education courses earns a degree within eight years (Bailey 2009).

Moreover, staggering numbers of developmental education students drop out before ever

enrolling in college-level courses (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). With the increased

national interests in college completion and career readiness from the Obama administration and

others (U.S. Department of Education, 2011), the relationship between developmental education

and community college persistence rates is under even greater scrutiny.

Completion agenda criticism. Skeptics of the completion agenda have asserted that the

completion reform movement is focused too simplistically on the amount of time taken to

graduate and worry that student achievement will be undermined (Harbour & Smith, 2015;

Humphries, 2012; Walters, 2012), factors (i.e., socioeconomics and academic preparedness)

contributing to students' abilities to persist are being underestimated (Harbour & Smith, 2015;

Humphries, 2012; Rhoades, 2012), and the costs of implementing the completion reform have

not been estimated (Belfied, Crosta, & Jenkins, 2014). According to Belfied, Crosta, and Jenkins

(2014), community colleges must address the fiduciary responsibility and institutional efficiency

necessary to implement completion agenda goals. In their analysis of whether or not community

colleges can afford the completion agenda, the authors presented an economic model that calculates the financial implications for efficiency expenditures "per outcome of reforms intended to improve completion rates at the college level" (Belfied, Crosta, & Jenkins, 2014, p. 328). Additionally, the authors noted that thus far, there has been limited research on the costs associated with the additional resources needed to implement completion reform.

In their study, Belfied, Crosta, and Jenkins (2014) examined how improvements in student progression and completion affect efficiency by applying a model simulation of economic implications on completion initiatives. The authors utilized a quantitative, case study methodology and applied their model to a single institution using cohort data of first-time enrollees in 2005-2006. The institution is representative of the average community college in key demographics: gender, race, FAFSA, institution size, and proportion of students enrolled in developmental education. However, the student population is younger than the national average. The authors concluded that in general it is difficult to increase college completion rates considerably. They further concluded that significant increases in expenditures are necessary to increase the completion rates which may be offset by tuition increases. Overall, strategies for increasing completion rates will have various financial implications and efficiency levels on community colleges.

Community colleges and the completion agenda. College completion rates are dismally low, with approximately 30% of first-time, full-time students earning a two-year degree within three years (Kelly & Schneider, 2012). As a result, over the last decade, for community colleges and two-year institutions, there has been an immense shift from a focus on access to one of student success (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; McClenney, 2013). Bailey (2012) analyzed the evolution of the completion agenda and its impact on the nation's community

colleges. He noted that this agenda is now the focus of higher education reform and that community colleges play a critical role thanks to the Obama administration and major private foundations such as Lumina, Jobs for the Future, and the Bill and Melinda Gates. In his study, Bailey analyzed attainment goals set forth by President Obama and private foundations as well as the extent of degree production increase necessary to reach these goals. In doing so, Bailey also offered comparisons between community colleges and for-profit institutions, noting that their business approach to education has had some success.

Bailey pointed out that attainment goals have varied by private foundation, the Obama administration and others. Despite their variances, Bailey asserted these goals are ambitious and require significant reform in order to achieve high impact. Further, community colleges are at the center of the reform movement, as the expectation by these foundations and the Obama administration is that an increase in associate degrees will help the U.S. economy. As an example, the Obama administration has called for an additional 5 million community college graduates, and the Gates Foundation's degree-goal initiatives are primarily focused on community colleges. However, according to Bailey, there are flaws with this overreliance on community colleges, including the fact that specific community college degree-completion goals are not well defined, and there are different target dates for meeting these goals. Bailey asserted the benefits of increasing certificate completion in lieu of degrees since certificates in some fields offer solid job opportunities for students. Bailey recommended a longitudinal analysis of for-profit institutions, including how their certificates and degrees are awarded, to determine if there are any lessons to be learned for community colleges.

AACC has published a series of briefs and articles on the community college completion agenda, calling on the nation's community colleges to take action. In 2010, AACC committed to

"increasing the number of community college students completing a degree or credential by 50% - to five million students by the year 2020" (AACC, 2015b, p. 1). AACC further acknowledged that while the community college "prides itself on flexibility for working adults," it is "failing too many of them." (p. 2). AACC gathered qualitative data to examine barriers to completion at the nation's community colleges in their April 2011 summary report of their annual joint board and commission meeting (McPhail, 2011). The report emphasized community colleges defining and clearly communicating what completion means, working towards an agreement on appropriate and useful measures of accountability, developing a completion toolkit that serves urban, rural, and suburban colleges equally, and addressing obstacles to completion (McPhail, 2011).

Baker (2012) addressed the policy implications of scaling successful completion agenda, grant-funded initiatives in the Colorado Community College System (CCCS). Using the phrase "initiative fatigue" (p. 25), Baker pointed out that innovative initiatives have become worrisome to community college leaders as they are often connected to completion rates, limited resources, and immense pressure from state and national policymakers to dramatically increase the number of degrees and certificates. There are 13 CCCS institutions serving 38% of all state residents and 45% of the state's minority undergraduates. There is a significant developmental education population, with 64% of 2009's incoming students testing into at least one developmental education course. As a result CCCS has participated in the Ford Foundation's Community College Bridges to Opportunity Initiative, the Colorado Lumina Initiative for Performance, and the Colorado SUN: The Office of Vocational Adult Education (OVAE) Ready for College Initiative. Baker (2012) concluded that replicating and scaling these initiatives with

modifications in policy and procedure is possible; however performance-based funding (PBF) would be necessary to implement change in critical areas.

Another example of a statewide community college system's completion agenda initiative is Maryland. In 2010, Maryland's 16 community college presidents signed a "Promise to Act" statement in support of the state's s completion goals which included the then state governor's 55% degree attainment by 2025 goal (MCCCP, 2012). In 2013, the state passed one of the nation's most ambitious and comprehensive college completion bills, the College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013 (Fain, 2014). The law simultaneously addresses completion initiatives for K-12, community colleges, and four-year institutions. While it does not set target projections for college graduation or retention rates, the 55% degree attainment by 2025 calls for an increase of more than 10 percentage points from the 44.4% rate in 2009 (Fain, 2014). Further in order to reach this goal, the legislation mandates specific action for the states' K-12 system, community colleges, and four-year institutions.

California is another example of a statewide community college system that has implemented completion initiatives. California's web-based, student performance scorecard grew out of broader statewide reform aimed at increasing student success and completion (Fain, 2015). Issued in April 2013 for all 112 of California's community colleges, experts report that the data from the scorecard are among the best in public community colleges (Fain, 2015). Further, California's Assembly Bill 288, College and Career Access Pathways, was enacted in 2015 to create partnerships between public school districts and community colleges to increase high school and college completion rates. See Figure 2 for additional statewide completion agenda initiatives.

New Jersey's 19 community colleges enroll over 400,000 students across 70 campuses throughout the state. In response to the completion agenda, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, chaired by the state's 19 community college presidents, launched the Big Ideas Project in 2010 as a follow-up to their statewide transfer articulation legislation (Maliszewski, Crabil & Nespoli, 2012). The New Jersey Presidents' Council played a critical role in implementing policies stemming from this legislation on their campuses. "The law provided the opportunity for New Jersey's presidents to assert, formally, their support for the importance of the transfer function and, through the statewide transfer agreement, their confidence in the associate degree" (Maliszewski, Crabil & Nespoli, 2012, p. 75). Thus, these statewide examples of community college completion agenda initiatives require effective, ethical leadership in order to efficiently respond to the demands of the completion agenda.

Community college leadership and the completion agenda. The completion agenda, with its high expectations for increasing attainment rates at the nation's community colleges, poses additional pressures for CEO's and other leaders and creates opportunities for moral dilemmas in implementing policies. As an example, to meet the greater demand for persistence and higher completion rates, community college presidents must figure out ways to scale reforms more quickly (Aspen Institute, 2013). Given that scholars have asserted that community college leaders confront complex moral dilemmas in their daily practices (Hellmich, 2007; Nevarez & Wood, 2010), responding to the completion agenda can exacerbate these moral dilemmas. As such, for community college presidents, the manner in which they frame and share information inside and outside of the organization and interpret the institution's mission in the context of their individual roles as leaders stem from their personal ethical perspectives (Mitchell, 2012). Further, scholars and educators are concerned that there is a void in ethical leadership in higher

education institutions, leaving them bereft of leaders equipped to ensure effective, ethical leadership (Wood & Nevarez, 2010).

Ethical Leadership

There is an abundance of literature on leadership and ethics going back to Plato and Aristotle. Wax (2007) provided a theoretical argument for ethical leadership based on Plato's *Republic* which he summarized as "being values-based (i.e. having ethical principles) is essential for being an effective leader" (p. 16). Likewise, Northouse (2007) summarized the historical perspective of ethics theory going back to Plato and Aristotle. According to Northouse, Plato and Aristotle's views on being a moral human being included temperance, courage, self-control, generosity, honesty, sociability, modesty, fairness, and justice. Further, Northouse (2007) reported that "ethics is central to leadership because of the nature of the process of influence, the need to engage followers in accomplishing mutual goals, and the impact leaders have on the organization's values" (p. 428).

In the last two decades, there has been increased interest in the nature of ethical leadership due to numerous scandals throughout the nation, with Enron being one of the most infamous. Although the business sector and healthcare industries have contributed the most research on ethics and leadership, in the last decade, educators have begun showing heightened interest in ethical leadership (Hellmich, 2012; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Starrat, 2004; Wood & Nevarez, 2014). Moreover, because pressures due to declining budgets, fundraising, enrollment and politics can eclipse the true mission of higher education (Boggs, 2003; de Russy & Langbert, 2005; Vaughan, 1992), these pressures can lead to ethical dilemmas for today's community college leaders. Thus, research has revealed that educators are frequently accused of

unethical or self-serving behavior, leading to charges of misconduct or corruption (de Russy & Langbert 2005; Kelly & Chang, 2007).

Hellmich (2007) provided an overview of the responsibility of ethical leadership at the community college, including faculty, staff, administrator, and presidential leadership. In doing so, Hellmich (2007) also discussed the distinction between power and influence as it pertains to these groups, noting that influence is connected to formal and informal social structures, whereas power is typically tied to formal organizational structures. While many researchers have agreed that leaders can have significant influence on followers, a literature review of ethical leadership revealed a vast range of viewpoints from scholars who have studied a spectrum of factors associated with leadership and ethics (Northouse, 2007). This literature review, however, is focused on ethical leadership and its relationship to ethical decision-making.

The literature on ethical leadership intersects with transformational leadership (Northouse 2007; Yukl, 2013) which originated with Burns (1978) and servant leadership which originated with Greenleaf (1977). Northouse (2007) conveyed that Burn's transformational leadership places a strong emphasis on followers and is fundamental to ethical leadership because of its emphasis on the moral dimensions of leadership. Yukl (2013) asserted that transformational leaders strive to raise the consciousness of followers by appealing to morals and ideas such as equality, justice, peace, liberty, and humanitarianism. However, Bass and Steidmeier (1999) asserted that there's a critical difference between authentic and pseudo transformational leadership. Authentic leadership they defined as ethical, while pseudo leadership was generally unethical and self-serving. Bass and Steidmeier (1999) further postulated that if transformational leadership is not innately moral as Burns stated, then investigating how to recognize, assess, and develop ethical leadership must be researched. Servant leadership is another early concept of

ethical leadership (Yukl, 2013). Based on Greenleaf's proposition that service to followers is the major responsibility of leaders and the essence of ethical leadership, Yukl (2013) asserted that servant leaders establish trust by being honest, open and ensuring that their actions are consistent with values.

Ethical leadership defined. Although research on ethical leadership is in its early stage of development, there are several modern definitions of ethical leadership. As noted in Chapter I, Brown, Trevino, and Harrison (2005) defined ethical leadership as the "demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (p. 120). Northouse (2007) defined ethical leadership as being "rooted in respect, service, justice, honesty, and community" (p. 448). Yukl (2013) asserted that a study of executives defined ethical leadership as one's behaviors, values, and motives being informed by honesty, trustworthiness, altruism, and fairness. Lawton and Paez (2014), building on Brown, Trevino, and Harrison's (2005) definition, described the ethical leader as reflecting "both the moral person in terms of individual virtues such as honesty and integrity, and the moral manager in terms of setting an example [and] communicating ethical standards" (p. 641). Despite this growing interest in ethical leadership, scholars have debated appropriate ways to define and assess it (Yukl, 2013). Thus, the need to develop an understanding of the nature of ethical leadership has inspired researchers to continue to investigate its nuances (Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2013).

Ethical leadership review of the literature. A review of the literature suggests that much of the seminal research on ethical leadership has been conducted by Brown and Trevino who published a literature review of ethical leadership literature in 2006. In their review, they

summarized the major concepts of ethical leadership and the similarities and differences with other leadership theories and concepts, focusing on "ethical role modeling, the organization's ethical context, and the moral intensity of the issues that the leader faces in his or her work" (p. 600). The authors proposed 12 factors, both positive and negative, associated with ethical leadership that they gleaned from their review of the literature. One positive factor was "being able to identify a proximate, ethical role model during one's career is positively related to ethical leadership" (p. 601). Another positive factor was that "leader moral reasoning level is positively related to ethical leadership" (p. 605). Another positive factor the authors proposed was "ethical leadership is positively related to follower ethical decision-making" (p. 607). Based on their review of the literature, the authors proposed that neuroticism and Machiavellianism are negatively related to ethical leadership. In Lawton and Paez's (2015) review of the literature on ethical leadership, the authors suggested that virtues, integrity and authenticity are the essential characteristics of ethical leaders. They also asserted that studies on ethical leadership have moved beyond an emphasis on individual attributes and extended to political, cultural and social norms. Lastly, Brown, Trevino and Harrison (2006) in their study of MBA students, developed an instrument to measure ethical leadership (ELS) constructs because their review of the literature confirmed that an "ethical leadership construct has not yet been precisely defined or adequately measured" (p. 129). Based on their study, the authors concluded that ethical leadership is positively related to "consideration behavior, interactional fairness, leader honesty and…transformational leadership" (p. 130).

Community college ethical leadership. Community colleges are experiencing greater numbers of presidents and other senior-level administrators retiring at alarming rates across the nation leaving vast numbers of vacancies to be filled (Aspen Institute, 2013; O'Banion, 2007;

Oliver & Hioco, 2012). This anticipated turnover in leadership positions creates an opportunity to "bring in fresh blood at a time when two-year colleges face increasingly complex demands" (Evelyn, 2001, p. A36). However, the influence and power dimension of leadership encompasses a considerable ethical burden and responsibility according to many scholars (Hellmich, 2007; Wallin, 2007; Wood & Nevarez, 2014). Thus, a transition in leadership will require future leaders who are not only equipped to handle the increased demands of the current higher education completion climate but that they do so in an ethical manner. Boggs (2003) stated, "Future community college leaders must be models of integrity, honesty, and high ethical standards….They must realize that retaining their popularity is not as important as doing what is right" (p. 20). Wood and Nevarez (2014), however, asserted that the five core virtues needed for today's community college leaders are "diversity, social justice, integrity, accountability, and compassion" (p. 8).

Vaughn (1992), in his seminal work on ethical leadership in community colleges, discussed the ethical dilemmas inherent in senior leadership positions. He contended that community college presidents, in particular, have an extraordinary responsibility to their institutions not only because of their students but also to the community because of their high visibility. He noted that because of the unique position of the presidency, the "final responsibility for ethics does indeed rest with the president, whether the president chooses to promote ethical conduct or run the risk of ignoring ethical misconduct" (p. 19). Further, Vaughn asserted that ethical dilemmas are inherent for community colleges because of their interactions with society.

In 2003, Boggs identified essential character traits necessary for 21st century community college leaders including fairness, integrity, high ethical standards, and openness to new ideas. Moreover, Boggs's forward to Hellmich's (2007) *Ethical Leadership in the Community College:*

Bridging Theory and Daily Practice provided a context for ethical leadership within community colleges, noting that the president establishes the tone for ethical and fair behavior, but trustees, vice presidents, deans and others who are in positions of influence also share in that responsibility. In his forward, Boggs provided a prelude to scholars' thoughts on the qualities community college leaders must exhibit to be successful in their roles. These qualities included: a) ethical leadership, b) professional ethical identity development, c) transformational leadership, d) civic engagement, e) leadership education, and g) ethical decision-making. Similarly to Boggs, Anderson, Harbor, and Davies (2007) argued for the need for formal, ethical identity professional-development initiatives to support community college leaders who are facing a myriad of challenges that emerge from political, economic and technological issues in higher education.

Community college presidents and ethical leadership. The president has the ultimate role and responsibility of demonstrating ethical leadership within the community college. For today's community college presidents, this responsibility is further complicated by a rapidly changing student demographic and demands stemming from the completion agenda. Anderson, Harbour, and Davies (2007) noted that while there has been considerable research on the development of community college presidents, to date, there is limited research on the ethical dimension of leadership. This is unfortunate given that college presidents operate in a world ripe with potential ethical calamities (Davis, 2007; Mitchell, 2012; Vaughn, 1992; Wood & Nevarez, 2014). As such, today's community college presidents require training and professional development beyond Vaughn's (1992) suggestion that "probably the most effective way for presidents to bring an ethical approach to their leadership is to be above reproach in their own professional and personal actions" (p. 24).

In 2013, The Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream (ATD) published *Crisis and Opportunity: Aligning the Community College Presidency with Student Success*. The two organizations collaborated to investigate the fundamental competencies necessary for today's community college presidents who are responding to a "rapidly changing context" (p. 3) that includes greater accountability measures, performance-based funding, and increased transparency regarding the number of students who graduate and are employed (The Aspen Institute, 2013). Based on interviews with 14, high-achieving community college presidents; nine student success reform experts; two focus groups of ATD Leader College presidents; and a meeting with community college presidents and experts, they proposed five core qualities common in highly effective community college presidents.

1. Deep commitment to student access and success

2. Willingness to take significant risks to advance student success

3. The ability to create lasting change within the college

4. Having a strong, broad, strategic vision for the college and its students, reflected in external partnerships

5. Raise and allocate resources in ways aligned to student success

In addition to the work of The Aspen Institute and ATD, many scholars have addressed leadership theories in the context of community colleges; however, as noted above, there has been limited research since Vaughn (1992) on the role ethical leadership plays for community college presidents. The most notable exceptions have been book publications by Hellmich (2007); Nevarez and Wood (2010); and Wood and Nevarez (2014). Hellmich argued that presidents have the additional responsibility of ethically responding to boards of trustees, internal and external influential members of the community, and regional accrediting agencies. Hellmich

(2007) asserted that in an ideal situation, a community college president's influence extends beyond the president's structural power.

Several other scholars contributed to the discussion of community college presidents in Hellmich's book. Most notably is Wallin (2007) who stressed the significance of ethical leadership in community college presidents and referenced AACC's (2005) code of ethics for community college CEOs and Northouse's (2004) five basic principles of ethical leadership. Wallin argued that both are perfectly suited for community college presidents. Northouse's principles of respecting others, serving others, being honest, being just, and building community (Northouse, 2007), dovetailed with AACC's code of ethics according to Wallin. AACC's (2005a) Recommended Code of Ethics for Community College CEOs are:

- Trust and respect for all individuals

- Honesty in all actions

- Just and fair treatment of all people

- Integrity in all actions

Further, Wallin (2007) outlined a series of questions pertaining to ethical issues community college presidents may face, including questions regarding due process for faculty, staff and students; questions regarding student acceptance and placement; questions regarding community college business partners; questions regarding fundraising; and questions regarding board memberships. She concluded with a call for ethical leadership in today's community college presidents.

Nevarez and Wood (2010), in *Community College Leadership and Administration: Theory, Practice, and Change,* discussed the role of ethical leadership for community college leaders at all levels, including the president. In their chapter on ethical leadership, the authors

argued for the importance of understanding the community college code of ethics, utilizing

multiple ethical paradigms, and employing ethical decision-making models. Building on Brown,

Trevino, and Harrison's (2005) assertion that ethical leadership is the intersection between

ethical decision-making and ethical leadership, Nevarez and Wood (2010) defined ethical

decision-making as the "process by which established standards of behavior are used by leaders

to approach, evaluate, and construct decisions" (p. 108). Similar to Wallin (2007), Nevarez and

Wood (2010) emphasized AACC's 2005 *Recommended Code of Ethics for CEOs of Community*

Colleges as appropriate for today's community college leaders. They defined ethical paradigms

as "an ethical lens or point of view that individuals use to view the world and respond to

dilemmas" (p. 112).

Recently, Wood and Nevarez (2014) followed up their Nevarez and Wood (2010)

publication with *Ethical Leadership and the Community College: Paradigms, Decision-Making,*

and Praxis, where they delved more deeply into the four ethical decision-making paradigms for

community college leaders. As the authors noted in Nevarez and Wood (2010), while scholars

have discussed a number of ethical paradigms, Wood and Nevarez (2014) adapted Shapiro and

Stefkovich's (2005) four primary ethical decision-making paradigms for education leaders

specifically for community college leaders. The four paradigms include the "ethics of justice,

critique, care, and the profession" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005, p. 7).

Ethical Decision-Making

Community college leaders, in particular CEO's, must respond to complex dilemmas.

Anderson and Davies (2000) asserted that community college presidents and boards can manage

ethical dilemmas by utilizing an ethical decision-making model. Wood and Nevarez (2014)

encouraged community college leaders to utilize ethical paradigms when considering and

constructing which options to exercise in their decision-making processes. The authors

acknowledged that community college leaders are responding to an ever changing landscape that

requires an awareness of their ethical decision-making processes. Further, they posited that

community college leaders rarely anchor their decision-making in philosophical or ethical

theory; instead, decisions are based on personal viewpoints and experiential knowledge. Thus,

they recommended that community college leaders employ the four ethical decision-making

paradigms of justice, care, critique and community.

      Ethical decision-making paradigms. The ethic of justice paradigm is grounded in the

belief that the right decision in a particular situation will be based on rules or law (Wood &

Nevarez, 2014). Wood and Nevarez (2014) build upon Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) who

conceptualized the ethic of justice as "viewing ethical dilemmas from…the more abstract

concepts of fairness, equity and justice" (p. 13). Thus, a justice-oriented leader frames problems

and approaches ethical dilemmas from this perspective and "emphasizes rational decision-

making that is morally objective" (Wood & Nevarez, 2014, p. 59). The ethic of critique, on the

other hand, is a decision-making paradigm that upholds critique of social structures that are

inequitable in society, such as class, gender, race and other areas of difference (Shapiro &

Stefkovich, 2005). Wood and Nevarez (2014) view an ethic of critique as a counter to an ethic of

justice. "While justice leaders see the rule of law as the primary base for determining what is

'right' or 'good,' an ethic of critique points to instances where laws, codes, and policies have

created the opposite policies" (Wood & Nevarez, 2014, p. 72). The ethic of care is in

juxtaposition to the ethic of law (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Wood & Nevarez, 2014). Leaders

employing this paradigm are attentive to the needs of others and consider "multiple voices in

their decision-making processes" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005, p. 18), as opposed to rules,

policies and laws as the guideposts. The ethic of care "prioritizes virtues of care, compassion, trust and understanding" (Wood & Nevarez, 2014, p. 91). Lastly, the ethic of local community as proposed and defined by Wood and Nevarez (2014) has similarities with Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2005) ethic of the profession. When employing the ethic of profession, educational leaders take into consideration their professional code of ethics which may be embodied in the ethic of justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). Articulated specifically for community college leaders, Wood and Nevarez (2014) posited that the ethic of local community leader "leads with one concern in mind, the best interests of our local community" (p. 106).

Ethical decision-making and community colleges. As mentioned above, there has been very little research on ethical decision-making in the community college. Prior to the work of Wood and Nevarez (2014), Anderson and Davies (2000) presented a six-step, decision-making model for community college boards and presidents to consider when faced with ethical dilemmas. The six steps they mentioned were as follows:

- Identifying the ethical dilemma

- Gathering facts, self-monitoring, and consulting

- Asking important questions

- Creating alternate courses of action

- Evaluating alternatives by ethics code, law and moral motivation

- Implementing a course of action by moral follow-through and virtue ethics

Mitchell (2012) conducted a study of ethical leadership and decision-making for community college presidents. The purpose of Mitchell's study was to examine how community college presidents' ethical perspectives influence leadership and decision-making. Using a qualitative research method, Mitchell interviewed 13 community college presidents in a

Midwestern state that was facing high unemployment rates, a declining economy, and no statewide higher education system. The 13 presidents represented a cross-section of the state's community colleges regarding size, location, and purpose, including tribunal. The author used AACC's (2005) Competencies for Community College Leaders as the conceptual framework for examining ethical leadership.

Mitchell (2012) concluded that a leader's ethical perspective influences all facets of leadership and decision-making. When making decisions, community college presidents consider their personal viewpoints about what is best for their organizations, which is influenced by their ethical lenses. The 13 presidents interviewed for this study had varying interpretations of AACC's competencies (2005), their role as leaders, and the community college mission. Yet, all presidents felt it was important that their decisions adhere to the college mission. Mitchell concluded her study with a series of recommendations for community college leadership: a) ethical content in leadership programs, b) leaders practice reflecting on their leadership styles, c) leaders must ensure that others understand the rationale behind their decisions, d) leaders must pay particular attention to the ethics behind decisions regarding resources, and e) search committees must consider the institution's culture when evaluating a president's ethical and leadership styles. Oliver and Hioco (2012) proposed a nine-step decision-making framework for community college administrators and those who teach graduate courses in higher education administration. Unlike Mitchell (2012), Oliver and Hioco's (2012) framework integrated critical thinking and ethics and listed nine questions centered on defining the issue; outlining alternatives, consequences, options; and considering the laws, policies, and standards surrounding the issue.

Summary

Higher education is a public interest, with many institutions receiving federal, state and local funds to operate. As such, higher education institutions have historically felt pressure and been influenced by federal, state and local governments who provide this funding and create legislation that governs how they operate. With the future of the nation's workforce at risk and the United States degree-attainment ranking having fallen below its global counterparts, not-for-profit and special interest groups have taken an even greater interest in protecting the success of the American higher education system. In this regard, the completion agenda has dominated the conversation of what to do about the U.S. higher education system, and in particular, community colleges who must implement policies stemming from the completion reform movement.

Many scholars have argued that ethical leadership plays a vital role for community college leaders, especially CEOs who must respond to the needs of various stakeholders, including their boards, faculty, staff, students, and local community. Community college leaders have a moral obligation to lead their institutions especially when they are under tremendous scrutiny to document that they are using federal funding and taxpayer dollars appropriately and that they are implementing reforms that will maximize efficiency (Belfied, 2012). The review of related literature on ethical leadership and decision-making provided definitions for ethical leadership, frameworks for ethical decision-making, and contextual information on leadership theories.

In general, scholars have reported that ethics is integral to leadership and that ethical leadership is rooted in transformational and servant leadership theories. Scholars also reported that ethical leaders have a strong sense of integrity, honesty, personal values, and moral reasoning. Scholars reported that community college leaders should have a personal ethical

identity that is grounded in the community college mission. The literature frequently reiterated the need for additional research on ethical leadership in community colleges as well as the anticipated gap in the community college senior leadership pipeline. Thus, given the current dearth in leaders prepared to assume senior-level positions at community colleges, it is incumbent upon these institutions to identify and train future leaders (Ebbers, Conover, &

Samuels, 2010). Scholars have confirmed that an essential component of training future community college leaders must incorporate strategies for ethical leadership and decision-making.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design, methodology, and procedures for this study. To structure my qualitative exploration, a multiple case study design was used with a cross-case analytical framework to allow for synthesis of patterns across individual cases. This chapter is organized as follows: a) description of purpose statement; b) description of the research questions; c) description of the guiding research perspective; d) details of the research design, data collection, and procedures of data analysis; and e) discussion of trustworthiness, credibility, and limitations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this descriptive, qualitative, case study was to examine how community college presidents perceived ethical leadership and executed ethical decision-making in responding to institutional policy implications stemming from the completion agenda. The study explored the ethical constructs Achieving the Dream (ATD) community college presidents operationalized as they employed decision-making processes related to implementing completion agenda policies at their institutions. These ethical constructs are based upon transformational and charismatic leadership theory (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005) which posit that CEOs would be better able to demonstrate transformational leadership because they establish their

organization's mission and vision; they hold the highest leadership level in the organization, and have the most autonomy in the organization (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005).

Research Questions

Given that a growing body of research already exists on the outcomes of the completion agenda, I was interested in community college presidents' ethical decision-making processes regarding completion agenda initiatives. The research questions for this study were:

1. How do community college presidents describe ethical leadership?

2. How do community college presidents execute decision-making as it relates to student success initiatives stemming from the completion agenda?

3. What is the role of ethical leadership in establishing policies that stem from the completion agenda?

Guiding Research Perspective

My exploration into the completion agenda and community college presidential leadership, as well as related literature on higher education policy implementation and ethical leadership, suggested that a qualitative, multi-case inquiry best suited my study. In addition to the limited research on the ethical dimension of leadership (Anderson, Harbour, & Davies, 2007; Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005), there is also little qualitative research on community college presidents' ethical leadership. According to Harbour, Anderson, and Davies (2007), "Qualitative researchers would add to our knowledge by examining the experiences and stories of individuals on the path toward constructive professional ethical identity development" (p. 181). I have selected case study research design in order to gain a rich understanding of how participants executed ethical leadership in their decision-making processes related to the completion agenda.

Merriam (1998) identified three features of case studies: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Particularistic refers to case studies focusing on a particular event, program, situation or phenomenon. This case study focused on the phenomenon of how community college presidents perceived ethical leadership and executed ethical decision-making. Descriptive means that the analysis and writing of the case will be a thick description of the phenomenon under study. In chapter 4, thick descriptions of this study included prose, imagery, quotes and figurative language to vividly portray how community college presidents defined ethical leadership and executed ethical decision-making. Lastly, heuristic means that case studies elucidate the reader's interpretation of the phenomenon under study by bringing about new meaning of the problem, extending the reader's understanding of the problem, or confirming what is already known about the problem. Chapter 4 extends the knowledge of ethical leadership, the completion agenda, and the role of community college presidents by providing the lived, personal experiences of three community college presidents.

Case study methodology is advantageous for researchers seeking "to gain in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 11). Case study research involves exhaustive analysis of individuals, organizational change, programs, decisions, or implementation processes (Yin, 2009). In case study methodology, the researcher's unit of analysis is critical to how the case is bounded and is directly related to the research questions (Yin, 2009). Through case study research, "a single unit or system bounded by space and time" (p. 11) is established (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006,) and serves as the "real-life phenomenon" (Yin, 2009, p. 32). Once defined, the case is examined through multiple sources of data and data collection techniques, including interviews, field notes, observations, and artifact analysis (Creswell, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 2009). According to

Creswell (1998), situating the case within its social, historical, economic or physical setting establishes the context of the case. In this case study, the bounded system or "case" was each individual president participant, who was situated within the same state and in the context of the state's response to the completion agenda. Yin (2009) recommended six sources of evidence for case study research: a) archival records, b) documentation, c) direct observations, d) interviews, e) participant observation, and f) physical artifacts. In qualitative case study research, the most significant use of documentation is to corroborate and enhance evidence from all sources (Yin, 2009) in order to elicit and confirm themes and theories as they emerge (Saldana, 2013).

Research Design: Case Study

Merriam (1998) identified three intentions for case studies. Descriptive case studies describe phenomena through a detailed account. Interpretive case studies go beyond description by developing conceptual or theoretical frameworks to question, validate or illustrate previous assumptions. Evaluative case studies present information for the reader to render judgement. My case study was descriptive and sought to fill the gaps in qualitative research on ethical leadership and ethical decision-making. It also attempted to present a comprehensive description of the phenomenon (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) of community college presidential ethical leadership and decision-making.

I selected multiple case study methodology because I was interested in studying complex phenomena within their contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Specifically, I was interested in examining a particular group of leaders (college presidents) within a specified context (at their Mid-Atlantic state community colleges). Since I was interested in focusing on one issue (how Mid-Atlantic state ATD community college presidents execute ethical decision-making in response to completion agenda policies at their institutions), a multiple, cross-case analytical

framework was used. Data from multiple cases is often regarded as more evidentiary and is therefore considered more robust (Herriott & Firestone, 1993). In multiple case studies, each case must be carefully selected so that it predicts similar results or divergent results for anticipated reasons (Yin, 2009). By selecting community colleges in the same state, who are members of the same student success reform movement network (ATD), and who have similar degrees of urbanizations (i.e. large, suburban), these three cases provided an appropriate opportunity for cross-case synthesis. Treating each institution as an individual case study, and then aggregating findings across each of the three institutions (Yin, 2009), allowed the researcher to uncover multiple perspectives on the research topic (Creswell, 2007). Multiple case study is a common strategy for increasing the external validity of findings (Merriam, 2009).

This study was based on a constructivist paradigm that claims that truth is dependent upon one's perceptions and is relative (Yin, 2009). In an interpretive or social constructivist approach to qualitative case study research, there is a transactional method of inquiry, allowing the researcher personal interaction with the case (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickinson-Swift, 2014). The case is developed in collaboration with the researcher and study participants, and presented to inform, engage, and invite the reader to participate in case discovery (Stake, 1995). According to Maxwell (2005), "The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (p. 22). Further, the primary mode a researcher can utilize to investigate an educational program, institution or process is through an analysis of the experiences of individuals involved in that program or institution (Seidman, 2013).

Participants. In selecting participants, I used purposeful sampling, which involves selecting research participants with a specific purpose in mind (Maxwell, 2005). The target

population for this study was community college presidents of ATD institutions in Mid-Atlantic state. There are more than 200 community colleges and institutions throughout 36 states and the District of Columbia participating in the ATD National Reform Network (ATD, 2015). Although there are 21 ATD institutions in the Mid-Atlantic region, I focused on the three ATD institutions in Mid-Atlantic state for several reasons: a) Mid-Atlantic state passed a state legislation in 2013 that legally requires its state community colleges take action to increase completion rates; b) Founded in 2003-2004 by the Lumina Foundation for Education, ATD is regarded as the catalyst or lynchpin for the completion agenda (McClenney, 2013); and c) Purposeful sampling, in which persons who match the criteria of a study are identified (Maxwell, 2008), suggested that these participants have the ability to provide insight into the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The criterion for selecting participants was individuals who currently serve as presidents at ATD institutions in Mid-Atlantic state because I was interested in hearing directly from them in regards to how they perceived and executed ethical decision-making. According to Merriam (1998), the criteria researchers establish for "purposeful sampling directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases" (p. 62). The goal of this study was to gain deeper understanding of participants' experiences. Restricting the sample to community college presidents of ATD institutions in the same Mid-Atlantic state allowed me to conduct a rich analysis of the data I collected in the context of the completion agenda within their state. Participants were identified through their institution's website without regard for any demographic factors (e.g. ethnicity, race, gender, etc.). At the time of the study, all participants served as community college presidents and had the responsibility of serving as their institution's chief executive officer (CEO). Participation was strictly voluntary.

Instrumentation

In contrast to quantitative research, which seeks to dissect a phenomenon to examine component parts, qualitative research strives to reveal how all the parts work in tandem to form a whole (Merriam, 1998). Primary and secondary sources were collected to create a robust and detailed account of each participant's experiences. Primary data were collected through personal interviews and observation of participant videos. Because no existing qualitative instrument could be found to address the central research questions, the interview protocol was developed after a thorough review of the literature and analysis of secondary data pertaining to the participants and their institutions. Secondary data were collected through the public domain including institutional websites, ATD website, strategic plans, accreditation reports, press releases, legislative hearing transcripts and videos, annual reports and social media. Data sources for this case study included semi-structured interviews, documents, and social media. Social media included Twitter, Facebook, video blogs and messages, and YouTube videos (see Appendix A).

Semi-structured interviews. This study used a semi-structured interview protocol. Interviews lasted between 45-90 minutes, allowing the researcher to gather thick, personalized information (Mason, 2002). In a semi-structured interview, the researcher investigates the subject matter through pre-determined and flexible open-ended questions. In addition, the researcher poses follow-up questions to elicit even deeper understanding of themes of interest (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Prior to the interview, I reviewed campus and presidential documents and social media in order to understand the presidential context and to help develop the interview questions. Interview questions were designed to garner a better understanding of the role of community college presidents in the context of ethical leadership, ethical decision-making, and

the completion agenda. Table 1 illustrates a cross reference between the central research

questions and the interview protocol. Interviewing was selected for this research study because it

permitted focused, conversational, two-way communication (Merriam, 2009) and for the

following reasons:

- It increases the possibility to generate rich data;

- Participant's language was considered critical to gaining insight into the participant's

  values and perceptions;

- Relational and contextual elements were seen as critical to understanding the

  participant's perspective;

- Data generated can be interpreted from a variety of angles (Newton, 2010).

Table 1

Interview Protocol Questions and Cross Reference to Research Questions

Central Research Questions	Cross Reference with Interview Questions (IQ)
Central Research Question #1	
How do community college presidents	IQ #1, 1a
describe ethical leadership?	IQ # 3, 3a
	IQ #5
Central Research Question #2	
How do community college presidents	IQ #2, 2a
execute ethical decision-making as it relates	IQ #3
to student success initiatives stemming from	IQ #4, 4a, 4b, 4c
the completion agenda?	
Central Research Question #3	
What is the role of ethical leadership in	IQ #2a
establishing policies that stem from the	IQ #3
completion agenda?	IQ # 4, 4a, 4b, 4c
	IQ #5
	IQ #6

Documents. Official documents including strategic plans; accreditation reports; annual reports; and mission, vision, values statements were analyzed, as well as presidential biographies, curricula vitae, and public speeches. According to Merriam (2009), "document is an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand" (p. 139). Social media documents, including YouTube videos, Facebook, Twitter, and presidential blogs were also collected and analyzed. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) posited that "popular culture documents produced for commercial purposes to entertain, persuade and enlighten the public" (p. 64) include news reports, audio and visual recordings. These documents were obtained through the Internet and are public in nature (Merriam, 2009) and offered insight into the case (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). Social media use by college and university CEOs and other top officials has been steadily rising. A 2012-2013 study found that more than half of those surveyed use social media (Barnes & Lescault, 2013). According to Yin (2009), when relevant, artifact analyses can be an essential component to an overall case.

Data Collection and Analysis

After carefully establishing an interview protocol (see Appendix E) and obtaining a signed interview consent form (see Appendix D), interviews were conducted. Multiple expert review of the interview protocol was employed in order to strengthen efficacy of the interview questions. Two interviews were conducted in person, while one interview was conducted via telephone due to the participant's schedule constraints. Participants were sent the interview protocol electronically prior to our interview. All interviews were recorded using a high-quality audio recorder. An IPhone 6 voice memo was used as a secondary recorder. Immediately following the interviews, the audios were converted to Mp3 files and sent to a transcription

service. YouTube videos were also sent to the same transcription service. After transcription, I reviewed the audios and made necessary corrections to the transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Documents were obtained via a search of each participant's official website. Merriam (2009), asserted that once documents have been located, they must be thoroughly assessed and authenticated. To ensure authenticity of the documents I obtained, I investigated each document's origin. As Merriam (2009) suggested, I also noted which documents were primary and secondary sources. According to Merriam (2009), "primary sources are those in which the originator of the document is recounting firsthand experience with the phenomenon of interest (p.152). Primary documents included YouTube videos, presidential blogs and Tweets. Secondary documents included newspaper and journal articles. Further, Merriam (2009) asserted that data found in documents can be used and analyzed in the same manner as interviews. After assessing the quality and authenticity of the documents, the researcher must "adopt some system for coding and cataloging them" (Merriam, 2009, p. 152).

Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to categorize data as interviews, reports, social media, or other documents, and to organize data by participant. Nvivo was also used to code all data. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) point out that Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) merely assist the reader because "the computer program only helps as an organizing or categorizing tool, and does not do the analysis for the researcher (p. 187). Scholars report that there are several advantages to using CAQDAS such as Nvivo to manage and analyze qualitative data, including: a) greater capacity for managing, organizing, and retrieving large amounts of data (Merriam, 2009), b) greater ability to closely examine data (Merriam, 2009), and c) concept mapping features enable the researcher to visualize relationships among codes and themes (Creswell, 2007).

To analyze the data collected during the research study, I used a variety of coding strategies that were organized around the research sub-questions and taking into consideration the conceptual framework of the study. Saldana (2013) described a code as a "word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a cumulative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). Coding allows the researcher "to organize and group [similar] data into categories or 'families' because they share some characteristic" (Saldana, 2013, p. 8). I employed a three-step coding process that included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Merriam, 2009).

Beginning with open coding, I reviewed the interview transcripts and all other documents multiple times to become very comfortable with what Yin (2009) refers to as the case study database. Once I became comfortable with the database, words and phrases that were indicative of particular concepts were marked with codes. First cycle coding can range in complexity from a single word to an entire page (Saldana, 2013). In the second cycle of coding, I reviewed the initial codes and began arranging them into preliminary categories using the axial coding technique. Axial coding involves prioritizing data by identifying relationships that emerge across the data during the open coding process (Saldana, 2013). Each participant's primary and secondary data was analyzed collectively to explore patterns and themes individually as well as among all of the participants.

In the final phase of coding, which Merriam (2009) refers to as selective coding, I recoded the data using the themes that represented the "central defining aspect[s] of the phenomenon to which all other categories and hypotheses are related or interconnect" (p. 200). Taking these themes into consideration, I made suppositions as to how the various categories of data demonstrated the ways in which community college presidents described ethical leadership

and executed ethical decision-making as it related to the completion agenda. Thus, in my selective coding, my core categories, propositions or hypotheses were developed (Merriam, 2009). My categories included a) how participants conceptualized ethical leadership which represented the ways in which they defined and described ethical leadership, b) how participants operationalized ethical decision- making which represented the ways in which they demonstrated ethical decision-making, and c) how participants institutionalized ethical decision-making which represented the ways in which they formalized ethical standards across the institution.

Researcher Positionality

As an instructional dean at the community college, I am aware of contemporary issues facing the community college. As an emerging, senior-level, community college administrator, I have been engaged in discussions about the completion agenda at my institution and within my state. Going into this study, I was mindful that today's community college presidents are facing tremendous pressure to increase completion rates for all students, including those who are among the most disadvantaged. I was interested in the participants speaking to this tension and explaining the ways in which they have developed their ethical leadership and used ethical decision-making to confront these challenges. As a community college educator, I held particular understanding of the urgency for completion and an awareness of my own professional code of ethics. To avoid compromising the trustworthiness of the data collected, I practiced reflexivity throughout the dissertation process by maintaining a research journal. This journal was used to reflect upon my assumptions and how they might potentially influence the research process.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Issues of trustworthiness and credibility differ in qualitative research versus quantitative research. In quantitative research, attention is paid to collecting facts of human behavior to verify and elaborate on a theory that allows researchers to state causes and make predictions; while in qualitative research, the objective is to better understand human behavior and experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Maxwell (2005), "The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (p. 22). As such, qualitative researchers must take care to ensure the validity or trustworthiness of their studies. Further, according to Maxwell (2005), "the main emphasis of a qualitative proposal ought to be how you will rule out *specific* plausible alternatives and threats to your interpretations and explanations" (p. 107). Moreover, Stake (1995) purports that the researcher's thoughts, feelings and responses while collecting and analyzing the data are part of the research process. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam, 1998). Given that researchers must analyze and report their interpretations of findings, deliberate steps were taken to enhance trustworthiness and credibility.

To enhance trustworthiness and credibility, I used the following strategies:

- Triangulation of data sources involves making use of multiple and different sources of information, methods and theories to provide deeper understanding of evidence (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through semi-structured interviews, document and social media analysis, I obtained detailed and varied data that helped provide a complete and revealing picture of what is happening (Maxwell, 2005).

- Reflexivity is a critical component of the research process that encourages maintaining a research journal that records the researcher's presuppositions and observations during the research process. The objective of researcher reflexivity is "thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see" (Mason, 2002, p. 5). I practiced reflexivity throughout the study by maintaining a research journal where I detailed the research process, my presuppositions, and researcher positionality.

- Member checking involves sharing data and tentative interpretations with the participants to validate if the interpretations are plausible (Merriam, 1998). To ensure accuracy in interpretation of data, participants were sent a representative excerpt of chapter 4 of this study and invited to clarify any misinterpretations.

- Peer examination involves gathering feedback from peers or qualitative methods experts in the field of educational research to ensure scrutiny of this case study report (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Throughout the development of this study, portions of my study, data instruments and analysis were shared with peers and experts in the field of qualitative research. These peers were selected based on their qualitative expertise as demonstrated by several years teaching qualitative research methods or recent publications of qualitative research.

Limitations

In qualitative research, data is inherently limited to what the researcher observes directly, reads or experiences (Creswell, 2002). Additionally, there are limitations to document analysis given that the documents were not developed for research purposes (Merriam, 2009). Moreover, case studies can also be limited due to preconceived notions or interpretive perceptions of the researcher (Best & Kahn, 2006). Additionally, the presence of the researcher during the observations may influence the authenticity of the observations and personal interviews. Another limitation of this research design is the selection of three community college presidents, in the same state, at the same type of institution – large suburban. While the institutions were chosen based on their ATD status, the degrees of similarity between the institutions further limit the generalizability of the findings. Another limitation of this study is that community college presidents, like most CEOs, are experts at controlling how information is communicated and, therefore, may not provide authentic responses to interview questions.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study will provide additional perspectives on how community college presidents define ethical leadership and execute ethical decision-making while facing the challenges of the completion agenda. Future researchers interested in community college leadership development, and those responsible for community college leadership graduate programs, may also find a qualitative analysis to be useful in assisting their own research and designing curriculum. Lastly, policymakers and those responsible for implementing mandates that stem from policy may find this research useful.

Summary

This chapter described the methodological choices for this study. This study employed a multiple, case study qualitative analysis to describe community college presidents' perceptions

of ethical leadership and ethical decision-making as related to completion agenda legislation in a

Mid-Atlantic state. The population included community college presidents from the ATD

institutions in Mid-Atlantic state. Data were obtained through personal interviews, observations

of YouTube videos and data analysis. Data were coded and analyzed in aggregate to protect the

anonymity of the presidents and their institutions. Additional steps were taken to mask the

identity of the participants, including using pseudonyms for the participants and their institutions.

Moreover, to further conceal the participants' identities, completion agenda legislation and

initiatives throughout the United States were discussed in addition to Mid-Atlantic state.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine how community college presidents described ethical leadership and executed ethical decision-making as it related to the completion agenda in their Mid-Atlantic state. The completion agenda is a movement begun by the Lumina Foundation in 2003-2004 dedicated to addressing the student success and completion rates at the nation's community colleges (McClenney, 2013). In 2004, Lumina Foundation launched Achieving the Dream (ATD), a national initiative dedicated to increasing student success and completion, especially among low income and students of color, through systemic change in the nation's community colleges (Mayer et al., 2014).

In 2010, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and five other community college organizations reaffirmed their commitment to completion while also maintaining their longstanding commitment to increasing access and quality (Mullin, 2010). Historically, the community college mission has emphasized access to higher education, especially for underrepresented groups which now includes but is not limited to low income, first generation, undocumented, students of color, veterans, students with disabilities, and marginalized groups (ATD, 2016b). This shift from access to persistence and completion has resulted in a constantly changing landscape for many community colleges, placing even greater responsibility and accountability on presidents. Responding to the call to significantly increase completion rates, often times through unfunded mandates and with greater scrutiny, suggests that it is "crucial that community college leaders possess a clear understanding of the ethical dilemmas that arise in this rapidly changing environment" (Nevarez & Wood, 2010, p. 100).

They must also be aware of the interrelationship between ethical leadership and decision-making (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005). This chapter describes the findings of three Mid-Atlantic state community college presidents serving at ATD institutions. This descriptive, qualitative case study included interviews, and document and social media analyses. The central research questions addressed in the findings are as follows:

1. How do community college presidents describe ethical leadership?

2. How do community college presidents execute ethical decision-making as it relates to student success initiatives stemming from the completion agenda?

3. What is the role of ethical leadership in establishing policies that stem from the completion agenda?

During the research process, a number of important themes evolved that described the ways in which ethical leadership was exhibited by community college presidents. Further, as I engaged the data and worked through the processes of coding and writing analytic memos, three additional overarching themes that corresponded with my three central research questions emerged:

- How community college presidents conceptualized ethical leadership

- How community college presidents operationalized ethical decision-making

- How community college presidents institutionalized ethical decision-making.

Table 2 illustrates the alignment between my central research questions and these overarching themes.

Table 2

Central Research Questions and Cross Reference to Overarching Themes

Central Research Questions	Cross Reference with Overarching Themes
Central Research Question #1 How do community college presidents describe ethical leadership?	Ethical Leadership Conceptualized
Central Research Question #2 How do community college presidents execute ethical decision-making as it relates to student success initiatives from the completion agenda?	Ethical Decision-Making Operationalized
Central Research Question #3 What is the role of ethical leadership in establishing policies that stem from the completion agenda?	Ethical Decision-Making Institutionalized

This chapter is organized in two sections. Section one begins with a summary of the demographics of the participants, their institutions, state and region. It is followed by a description of the major themes that evolved: a) accountability, b) advocacy and validation, c)

transparency, and d) equity. Section two is a discussion and analysis of the findings related to my three central research questions, which also corresponded to how community college presidents conceptualized ethical leadership and operationalized and institutionalized ethical decision-making.

Participant and Institutional Profile Summaries

Each of the participants is a current Mid-Atlantic community college president of an (ATD) institution in the same state. At the time of this study, there were 21 ATD institutions in the Mid-Atlantic region. Mid-Atlantic state was chosen for this study because of its statewide initiatives in advancing the completion agenda. These initiatives include statewide legislation, all of the state's community college presidents signing a completion pledge agreement in 2010 and the state's community college association conducting one of the first community college completion summit in the nation, an event that has since been held annually. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) is the higher education regional membership association for the Mid-Atlantic region.

Mid-Atlantic region community colleges. There are 116 accredited community colleges in the Mid-Atlantic region (MSCHE, 2016). Approximately 500,000 Mid-Atlantic state residents attend one of the state's community colleges in credit programs and workforce development and continuing education courses. The colleges represented within this study are all Mid-Atlantic public, 2-year institutions awarding an associate's degree as the highest degree. All institutions are identified as large, suburban institutions.

Mid-Atlantic state participants. To protect the identity of the participants, their state and their institutions, the participants have been given pseudonyms of President Smith, President Carter and President Davis. The institutions have also been given pseudonyms SCC (President

Smith), CCC (President Carter), and DCC (President Davis). SCC was accredited in 1966, is a multi-campus, large suburban institution with more than 25,000 full and part-time enrollments and 47% Pell grant recipients (ATD 2015b). SCC has ATD leader college status. ATD grants leader college status for three-year cycles to institutions who have demonstrated data-driven policies and practices committed to improving student success and closing achievement gaps (ATD, 2015b). CCC was accredited in 1969 and is a single campus, large suburban institution with nearly 14,000 full and part-time students and 39% Pell grant recipients (ATD 2015b). DCC was accredited in 1968 and is a single campus, large suburban institution with more than 17,000 full and part-time enrollments and 26% Pell grant recipients (ATD 2015b).

As stated in chapter 3, participants were selected for this study based on their ATD membership status and location in the same Mid-Atlantic state. There was no regard for participants' demographics, backgrounds, or expertise. Participants had varying levels of experience as community college presidents. Two of the participants have served as presidents of more than one institution; two of the presidents have served as president of their current institution for 9 or more years; and all of the presidents are coincidently female. Figure 3 illustrates the gender and experience of the participants.

Figure 3. Participant Gender and Experience			
Participants	More than 1 Presidency	9 or more years president of current institution	Female
President Carter		✓	✓
President Davis	✓		✓
President Smith	✓	✓	✓

Accountability and Ethical Leadership

Community college presidents are held accountable. They are responsible to their boards, regional accrediting bodies, communities, faculty and employees, and the students to whom they serve. In an era where overly simplistic accountability data are used to indict higher education for poor management (Hellmich, 2007), today's community college presidents are confronting the widespread adoption of institutional accountability initiatives (Harbour & Nagy, 2005). While accountability and costs dictate community college policy (Baker, 2012), community college presidents must be mindful of how the institution's mission and vision align with its accountability measures. They must also simultaneously bear in mind that the mission shapes the character and values of the institution and drive it toward a specific path (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

President Davis spoke directly and concretely to accountability quickly in our conversation. In discussing how she defined ethical leadership, she stated,

> I believe in shared success, but I also believe in shared accountability. I never tell people what to do because if they fail and they're following my direction, then it's my fault. I want to support people's work, make sure they've got to the consequences of the decision – thought about the risks, thought about the benefits, and then come forward with it.

On the other hand, President Carter described accountability in the context of the community college mission, and stated the following:

> Ethical leadership, I think, really calls for a level of accountability, responsibility, and a commitment to really understand the mission and the vision and to live that mission, vision, and value the way in which they are intended.

President Smith spoke first and foremost about credibility in regards to ethical leadership. Unlike President Carter and President Davis who defined ethical leadership by speaking to accountability, President Smith spoke to it by recalling a mantra she picked up earlier in her career: "Credibility is a college president's greatest asset. Protect it by always telling the truth."

Accountability as a measurement of success. In education, accountability is as often associated with academic achievement as it is associated with blame (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). Each of the participants was aware of the increased pressures of accountability measures. Interestingly, and perhaps partially because she served as a president of a community college in a state that had already passed completion legislation, President Davis saw Mid-Atlantic state's completion and accountability legislation as a good thing and offered this statement.

> I think it's about accountability. I think it's a good thing. It's making sure that the students that are coming into the colleges are actually attaining their goals. That's what we're supposed to be doing. I think there's been…such an emphasis on the number of students that come to the door, how many students, how many new students we have. But moving it to how many students actually get through the pipeline and come into the college to obtain a goal or certificate, a degree, transfer readiness, that those goals are met is good, and to that end, we're doing a lot.

She further emphasized that community college presidents should be held accountable for students reaching their educational goals and believed that there is even greater accountability because of the donations many community colleges receive. She stated,

> We should be held accountable to helping students be a partner with us in getting where they want to go. I think the completion agenda is great. I'm glad to see the push. As

people are giving dollars in donations, they want to make sure that their money is going

to something that's valuable.

On the other hand, President Smith felt that because of the completion agenda in some

ways, community colleges had been unfairly convicted of a crime they had not committed due to

being held accountable to false data. As a recognized community college leader in her state and

the nation with more than 30 years of service, and having held multiple leadership positions in

national higher education and state associations, she was personally offended by the use of

IPEDS data as the accountability instrument for the completion agenda. "There was such a

travesty that was brought about in that period of time by the wholesale transmission of this theme

of using IPEDS to measure completion. To this day this casts a long shadow," she stated.

As part of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the Integrated

Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) is the federal entity responsible for collecting, analyzing

and publishing higher education data (IPEDS, 2016). President Smith further stated that "in a

sector in which 65% of students attend part-time and many students seek workplace credentials

below the level of degree, continued use of IPEDs data to measure community college

completion rates has badly skewed our many successes." As she talked more about the

completion agenda, accountability, and IPEDS, she was comforted that community colleges had

come a long way since the early 2000s when the completion agenda was first launched. She

stated:

Now we're well past those conversations….In fact, I was at a meeting last summer.

There were 30 presidents in the room. A department head person was there, and she was

talking about IPEDS and what I loved was I didn't have to say a word. There were 12

other presidents on her in a minute to say, 'You can't use IPEDS. You can't just measure

completion by degrees, and you can't tell us we're failures because one measure out of

four seems to be wanting.'

For President Smith, an accurate portrayal of success and appropriate measures of accountability

were paramount. In fact, she made it a point to share with me that there are multiple measures of

success for community colleges and gave me a document from Mid-Atlantic state's completion

summit that identified how the state is being held accountable for its completion legislation.

According to President Smith's document, Mid-Atlantic state's community college association

holds themselves accountable in four areas: degrees, transfers, credit and non-credit certificates,

and workplace certification.

Like President Davis, President Carter addressed employee accountability. President

Carter asserted that presidents have a responsibility to hold their employees accountable for the

roles they play in helping students achieve their educational goals and made the following

statement:

Students want to change their lives and the lives of their families. If we can't help them

get there, or we have people who can't help them get there, or we have leadership that

stands in the way, then we do have to call that out and do something about it.

Accountability as personal responsibility. As president of one of the nation's

community colleges, the bottom line stops with the president. For President Carter, holding

herself accountable was important. She told me a story about a stakeholder demanding a quick

decision from her so that he could take action on an issue. Viewing herself as the ultimate

accountability figure of the institution, she stated, "Yes, but if something goes wrong, he's not the

college president." For President Carter, there was an ethical obligation to hold herself

personally accountable as the president for creating a culture of student success. Regarding her personal responsibility to ensure that students complete, she made the following statement:

> I think something that we're still sort of grappling with is moving away from the notion that students come here for all kinds of reasons and as long as they took one or two courses or three courses and walked away, maybe that's a success for the student because that's all they came here to do. My question has always been 'Is that what you would want your children to do?' Because I know when I went to college, my dad told me, 'I sent you there for a degree.' We had a mission in mind and an outcome we were looking for. Most families are not sending their young people, most families are not supporting their spouses, or their parents to come over, take a course or two, and walk away.

Further, President Carter stated in her presidential message to students that "our highest priority is to foster student success by serving as a gateway to affordable, accessible, and flexible education. It is our mission to create an educational environment that will improve and enhance your life educationally, professionally and personally." Creating this environment, according to President Carter's message, "involves continual assessment, accountability, and action, as we undergo our own transformation to create the conditions most likely to promote student success." Moreover, according to President Carter, "everybody is now being held to greater degrees of accountability."

As we discussed accountability in more detail and from a personal level of responsibility, President Davis elaborated and stated:

> There are so many more levels of accountability now than what there were historically in the community college system, which is good. Some people are apprehensive or not

necessarily supportive of it, but I think it's good. I think it keeps us honest. I think it

keeps people in check. I think it's a good thing.

President Smith, however, viewed accountability as a personal responsibility for all of

Mid-Atlantic state's community colleges. Like President Davis, she was acutely aware that

accountability is at the forefront of conversations about community college performance.

Speaking on behalf of Mid-Atlantic state's community college presidents at a legislative hearing

on completion, she stated that "community colleges welcome accountability. We wish, however,

to be held accountable for what we actually do as defined by our mission mandates rather than

by a measure that was never designed for our sector." For President Smith, being held

accountable to faulty information had placed a bull's eye on community colleges' backs. She

offered the following statement at one of Mid-Atlantic state's completion summits:

> Community colleges are on everyone's lips. We are on everyone's radar screens and that
>
> is a mixed blessing. A high profile certainly makes a large target and such fame comes
>
> with a price and a set of challenges the likes of which we have not seen before… funding
>
> compression, demands for accountability, financial aid reform, an emphasis upon success
>
> as well as access.

Accountability as a motivational force. Today's community colleges are facing more

and more unfunded mandates and less and less funding from their states and counties (Altstadt,

2012). As such, community colleges must demonstrate that they are accountable for their student

success results and that they are motivated by student completion (The Aspen Institute, 2013).

For President Carter, accountability was not only situated in student enrollment but student

outcomes which she linked to funding. She offered the following comment:

The more students you have, the more money that you have the potential to get, at least from the state level. But at the same time, having the right type of outcomes at the other end of this process is just as critically important.

Likewise, President Davis stated "we've got a lot of unfunded mandates. We've got a lot of expectations from all the different groups that are now either providing us with funding or not providing us with funding."

For President Smith, however, withholding funds based on inappropriate accountability measures was outrageous. She stated,

You're going to stop funding for us because we're not producing degrees by this little measure that you use? So talk about ethical leadership, you better have ethical measures or else you will never really be able to tell how successful we are.

As an example of the motivating force behind funding linked to accountability, President Smith shared a story with me about a scholarship opportunity not available to two-year colleges because they were being held accountable to IPEDS data. As she spoke, it was clear that she was determined to seize this scholarship opportunity for community college students because they had been unfairly disqualified. For President Smith, it was important to her to prove to the researchers who were establishing the eligibility criteria for the scholarship that they had been derelict in their duties for not considering other community college performance indicators. As she stated:

What was done to us was so unethical. When I had the chance to speak to these two researchers from the university who had been part of the creation of the study they used to say that community colleges don't graduate their students, they were actually shocked that I was accusing them of using bad data.

Advocacy and Validation in Ethical Leadership

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) listed community college advocacy as one of its five competencies for community leaders, stating that "An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision and goals of the community college" (AACC, 2005, p. 5). As the participants discussed their roles as presidents, especially in light of student success initiatives and the completion agenda, there was considerable overlap between advocating for the comprehensive community college mission of open-access, comprehensive educational offerings, equity, lifelong learning, and service to the community (Vaughn, 2000) and validating the varied trajectories of community college students and those who lead and teach them.

Setting the record straight. I went into my interview with President Smith having just read a November 2005 local newspaper article about her role as the new president of SCC. She had begun her first day two weeks before the article was published. While reading the article, I was struck by her comments about growing up as the daughter of a coal miner and the values she said her parents, particularly her father, had instilled in her. "My dad, a coal miner, told me, my three sisters and brother that we'd all be teachers. He taught us to embrace possibilities." She further stated in the article that her father was right and that they "all became successful because of the examples of my parents, children of immigrants, who showed us that love mattered, as did hard work."

As I sat in the lobby of the president's office waiting to begin our interview, I was fully aware that President Smith had been in the community college arena for quite some time and wondered what impact this might have on her candor. During our interview, she proudly stated that she had given her life's work to the community college mission and that she had been a

community college educator for over 30 years. As she spoke about her journey to the

presidency, I identified in some ways with her background. We both have spent over 15 years as

full-time English faculty members at community colleges, and we both came up the ranks to

deans' positions at institutions where we were once faculty. As we moved beyond general

knowledge-sharing about community colleges and delved more deeply into a discussion of

ethical leadership and decision-making, it was evident that President Smith did not intend to hold

much back in answering my questions.

Operating from the vantage point of someone with significant experience in the field and

a need to be vindicated by those who subscribe to and promote completion agenda propaganda,

President Smith advocated for students, faculty and the community college mission, while at the

same time validating the prominent role community colleges play in educating the nation's

workforce. In fact, she was pleased that I asked her directly about how the completion agenda

had affected her role as president of a Mid-Atlantic state community college. She responded,

> So I like your question because it gives me a chance to sort of say that there were some of
>
> us, and it was a small group at the beginning, who would stand up when these big
>
> discussions took place and people were saying 'You're failures.' To say, 'excuse us one
>
> minute here.…Half a million people go through our doors every, single year.'

President Smith reflected on how she and other Mid-Atlantic presidents held their ground

against Complete College America (CCA) and its president and founder, Stan Jones. Founded in

2009, CCA is a national nonprofit organization with the mission of helping to increase the

number of Americans with career certificates or college degrees and closing the achievement gap

of traditionally underrepresented populations (CCA, 2015). Ironically, when we spoke about this

issue, President Smith began by thanking Stan Jones for providing community college presidents with an opportunity to speak back.

> On some level, I'm grateful to Stan Jones; although, I was angry at him for a long time. Because his efforts were based on faulty data, it gave presidents with a strong base of what the community college is and what its mission is, the ability to consistently confront bad data, bad conclusions, and the bad rap being given to the community college.

However, for President Smith, when the AACC seemed to be jumping on the bandwagon and blaming community colleges, things had gone too far. As she stated, "even our own association, AACC, was saying that we're failures….I felt five or six years ago like an alien in a strange land."

As we continued our discussion on the completion agenda, President Smith expressed concern about the Obama administration's role in promoting U.S. community colleges as failures because completion had been too narrowly defined as earning a degree within a specified time period. According to President Smith, however, although President Obama did initially measure completion by degrees, he "back peddled very quickly. And point in fact, he ultimately became our strong ally on this multiple measures of completion."

As mentioned earlier, President Smith is highly regarded in Mid-Atlantic state, and has therefore, had many opportunities to discuss Mid-Atlantic state's completion agenda legislation. In her remarks at the state's legislative hearing on completion, she commented that "Not to recognize this diversity within the community college completion metric devalues our mission, disrespects our students, and undermines the cross currents that link the state's workforce and completion agendas." In delivering her remarks, she further elaborated, "We ask for recognition that student success—within the broad and diverse mission mandates that drive our sector—be

recognized as 'the real Completion' metrics for the state's community college." President

Smith's advocacy and validation, however, were not limited to her discussions on the completion

agenda. They were also evident in her comments about community college faculty, students, and

leaders.

In discussing student learning initiatives that often times negate faculty expertise and

commitment, she stated, "I was a faculty member for many years. I know if you said to me,

'You don't matter. Only the student matters,' I would have declared 'that's not true.'" Moreover,

in setting the record straight about community college students and the time it typically takes

them to complete she said, "…life gets in the way for community college students. It doesn't

mean they're dumb. It doesn't mean they're deficient. It doesn't mean anything about them." As

a community college leader, President Smith stated, "You go back to ethical leadership – if you

are an ethical leader of the community college, you do not let people stand up there and say to

you, 'Maybe you should all go back to being vocational institutions.'"

Like President Smith, President Carter is a nationally recognized community college

leader. She has served as president of CCC for nearly a decade and has served as an officer on a

number of national, regional and state boards and associations. President Carter was among the

small group of pro-active Mid-Atlantic state community college presidents that President Smith

mentioned was by her side advocating for the community college mission and validating

community college students' experiences. Unlike President Smith and President Davis, I

conducted my interview with President Carter over the phone due to her schedule. It helped that I

had met her previously through our memberships in an AACC affiliated association. During our

interview, it was clear that she wanted to convey ethical leadership in two categories: as it

pertained to employees, and as it pertained to students.

The Obama administration and community colleges. As a participant in the White House Summit on Community Colleges, President Carter has had several opportunities to advocate for the community college mission nationally and to validate the necessity for community college students to complete a certificate, degree or transfer. As such, she has explained that her institution's primary student success initiative is "the college's response to the charge by the Obama administration to all of higher education that we work to ensure that we have five million more individuals graduate with academic credentials beyond high school by the year 2020." Moreover, in a spring semester opening address to the college community, President Carter emphasized President Obama's recent State of the Union Address:

> I'd also like to remind you that many of us had the opportunity to listen to President Obama this past week as he talked about colleges and universities in his state of the union address. He reminded us that accessibility, affordability and accountability are the hallmarks of a college education and for us that really is about our student success completion initiative. You can find out more about this initiative on the college's website and portal. It details how we are planning to ensure that our students succeed. We're committed to providing our students with the tools they need to accomplish their goals in an associate's degree, a certificate, or licensure. We want our students to know that they have our support throughout this journey.

President Obama has visited CCC on several occasions. Regarding one of President Obama's visits, President Carter validated the work her institution has done. She stated in her president's message in an annual report that "By once again choosing to deliver a major address at CCC, the president reinforced the college's role as a leader in the areas of educational opportunity, workforce training, and economic development."

In the context of the completion agenda and the Obama administration, President Carter stated that her institution's primary student success initiative was connected to President Obama's call to the nation's community colleges. She stated the following in an interview with the local media:

President Obama several years ago talked about the role of community colleges, especially as it relates to economic development and the recession and putting people back to work with credentials in a short period of time with certainly the associate degree. So, I believe that along with the 15 other institutions that were recognized that day as a White House Champion of Change that really we are proving that the work we do every day with students from across this nation is really putting people back to work by giving them a set of skills and credentials that can make them readily marketable for the job market as well as helping students transfer on to four-year institutions….

The president and members of his cabinet, his administration have been very focused on making sure that the United States of America really gained its place in the world as one of the most educated countries across this globe. And he believes, and certainly we share that belief, that community colleges can help in reaching that goal. His desire is that by the year 2020 we have five million more graduates who have at least an associate degree as an academic credential… Look at the fact that community colleges across the country serve more than 10 million students. People who choose to start at community colleges either move into the world of work and/or transfer at some point from those institutions into four-year institutions. It only stands to reason that we are a critical part of that equation.

President Smith has also had the opportunity to participate in White House conversations

regarding the nation's community colleges. Interestingly, her advocacy of the community college mission and validation of community colleges includes taking exception to community colleges initially being treated as second class citizens. She made the following comments about a White House summit she attended during an address to Mid-Atlantic state's community colleges:

Yesterday, I was very pleased to once again have the heady experience of being invited to the White House Summit on advancing educational opportunity for low income and minority students. This was a follow-up day from one that convened in January. Out of a hundred college presidents invited to the White House, only 10 were community college presidents….

The role community colleges play as the premiere access point for low income and minority students to take advantage of higher education in the United States of America was on everyone's lips. That felt really good because those of us who were there in January, even though we were few we were mighty, and we made it very clear to the president and to his staff and to all the presidents from Yale and Harvard who were there that if you really want to make this happen, if you really want to increase the number of low income and minority students who will make their way to a degree, certificate or a workplace certification, you can't do it without us because millions, millions, millions pass through our doors. We can do what Yale cannot. We can do what MIT and Harvard cannot…. Without us, this goal just isn't attainable.

Award of validation. Prior to meeting President Davis for our interview, I was mindful that among the three participants, she has had the shortest tenure as a president in Mid-Atlantic state, although she had served as a community college president in another region. As I sat in the lobby of the president's suite waiting for our interview to begin, I was reminded that she was the

only participant to mention leadership style, ethics and character on her president's webpage, noting that she had won an award in these areas for her work as a president at her former institution. As I was escorted into her office, President Davis greeted me warmly, invited me to have a seat, and quickly began our interview. Within a few moments, it was apparent to me that she had considered herself an ethical leader for quite some time. It was not surprising, then, that our interview delved more directly into a conversation about ethical leadership than one about the completion agenda.

In many ways, President Davis's advocacy for the community college mission and validation of her work as a community college president hinged on her simplistic definition of ethics as "being honest, moral, values-centered, student focused," for which she had been awarded. Like President Smith and President Carter, President Davis had been invited to a White House community college summit focused on partnerships with industry and the government. According to President Davis, advocating for community colleges requires reminding people that "we work to empower people through education. We support the training needs of a diverse workforce, while offering stellar academic and general education curricula needed to attain an associate of arts degree or meet transfer requirements."

Transparency and Ethical Leadership

AACC lists communication as one of its core competencies for community college leaders, noting that effective community college leaders use "clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community, to promote the success of all students, and to sustain the community college mission" (AACC, 2015, p. 4). The participants in this study affirmed the importance of communication, especially as it pertained to their responsibility to be transparent with

stakeholders.

For President Davis, being transparent was directly connected to ethical leadership and was an effective strategy for helping stakeholders understand her decisions. She stated the following in regards to ethical leadership:

It involves being honest. It involves being transparent. It involves being able to justify the decisions that you make. I think people have the right to understand why you make a decision. I think as a good leader, if people know the rationale of why you're doing something or why you're moving in a direction, I think it helps them.

Stories of transparency and ethics. Community college presidents make decisions every day, some tougher than others and some that many may feel call into question their motives or ethics. As President Smith and I talked about some of the challenges she has confronted over the years as a president, one ethical dilemma stood out above all others because it forced her to be honest, strategic and transparent in order to protect the integrity of the institution. When President Smith came to SCC, she stated that "within a month, I knew that the only way SCC could become what it is today – one very strong, highly influential, very successful community college – would be to make a radical change at the top." For President Smith, her decision to "create one institution that has singular policies and procedures that apply all across the institution in the same way that the integrity of our academic offerings is the same" was the ethical thing to do. She shared the following story as an example of an ethical dilemma she faced her first year at SCC.

So when I arrived and spoke to the faculty and staff and I thought, 'You know what? These are people just like me.' We were all good, solid community college professionals …, and within a month I proposed to the board of trustees a radical redefinition of that

executive level….We will be one college. We will not be a system…Every procedure, everything we did would have to be developed so that it would embrace this whole institution…. I really do believe that the single most important step taken was that the board agreed to my proposal to shape a leadership team that clearly was committing itself not only to ethical leadership but to actually making sure that every single one of us focused on what role we played in achieving our mission.

President Carter shared a story of transparency from her days as a vice president of student services that she believed helped shape her understanding of ethical leadership:

I came here as vice president for student services and there were things that were in policy or procedure that had a precedent attached to them that I didn't think really quite fit who we said we were as an institution or, quite frankly, where we needed to go because higher education was, as it is today, changing. And there are dynamics that treating people the same and treating them fairly, in my mind, are two different things…. I worked to sort of twist a policy that would allow us to help a student and the parent who came in. It seemed to be the right thing to me what they were asking. I talked to a couple of people about it and it wasn't that it was the wrong thing to do. It was that a policy stood in the way and no one ever thought about the fact that we needed to change that policy because it was antiquated and it really was not allowing us to help students. Well, as the vice president, I stepped in and made a decision that I thought was in the best interest of the student ….

I explained to the student and the parent that the policy said something very different but that I was going to actually go out on a limb, override the policy, and allow this thing to happen. Well, when the student was not performing well, they came back to

get their money back. I said 'no, no, no, no. That can't happen because I overrode the policy in order to allow you to do this. Based upon our conversation, and the case that you laid out,' and so they filed a complaint with the president. What they used as the basis for the complaint was that I didn't follow institutional policy…. What I learned about that is that the policies are there for a reason and that what you're going to have to do is you have to be able to say this is the policy as it is today.

President Davis's story of transparency and ethical leadership involved unionization. Regarding unions, she stated the following in an interview with local media:

We know that there are still a group of people that are interested in unionization on our campus. I testified against unionization two years in a row now. We've talked very openly with our faculty about my desire, our desire to be open access to our faculty and staff so that faculty and staff don't have to go through with the union. I mean the benefit of having shared governance, the benefit of not having a union is that things aren't prescriptive and to me that lends itself to a much more collaborative relationship. Unions will come in and they work on halting conversations like these kind of tough conversations that I think are important because they first instill fear and then they create a solution.

During our interview, President Davis was candid about her feelings towards unionization, admitting that there will likely be unions at DCC in the future. She stated, "we see it definitely on the horizon…. when you're involved in things like unions, you've got to be really careful that the college stays on the right path and things aren't done for any other reason than it's the right thing to do." She acknowledged that the aforementioned audio of her comments about unionization was available on the Internet and that she had been heavily criticized for

being transparent about her feelings. In sharing her story with me about unionization, she gave the following statement:

> When the unions were really trying to rally, they requested a FOIA of everybody who worked here, their salaries. But they also got their addresses because it's public record. Some of these people would show up at employees' houses when they were going to church. One woman said 'I'm going to church on a Sunday night at 6 o'clock, and I walk into my driveway, and there is someone there asking me to sign a petition who won't leave until I sign it….'

> My stance against unionization came with heavy criticism, and I'd say the same thing. I'm not upset about my position at all. I testified against unionization. It's a big deal for us. We don't have the money for it. Quite frankly, I don't think it's necessary.

Methods of transparency. As noted above, transparency is vital to a successful presidency and involves multiple methods of conscientious, direct communication with stakeholders. All of the participants spoke to being transparent leaders. For President Smith, being transparent was also about being visible to those you serve. She stated, "You certainly can't sit in your office. If you're not out on your campus or campuses or finding ways to interact with people, they won't see you and they won't know you." Transparency at SCC was discussed in its strategic plan and elaborated upon in its accreditation self- study report. A statement from the self-study report on transparency is provided below:

> The President's office serves as a repository for all approved policies resulting from shared governance, assures that these policies are available … and ensures College handbooks are updated regularly to include new and/or revised policies. These responsibilities are assigned to a staff member in the President's office. A comprehensive

list of policies is compiled annually and distributed to the Senate membership. These procedures promote greater transparency and integrity in the College's system of governance.

President Carter's transparency was also discussed in the context of her institution's strategic plan. Like President Smith, formal transparency at CCC was mentioned in its accreditation report. In our interview, she talked about the transparency involved in collectively developing a strategic plan to which she would hold them all accountable. She stated about the strategic plan:

> We built it from the ground up, which means that you all got together, you developed a draft plan, and then you brought it to the senior administration. Ninety percent of the plan was accepted as is. Probably another six or seven percent, the words were tweaked and there might have been one thing where we changed a sentence, but when it came from the body of the organization, then the expectation is that this is what we believe and that we're going to do everything in our power to make this happen.

Like SCC and CCC, at DCC there were statements in annual reports and strategic plans about being transparent. However, unlike President Smith and President Carter, President Davis linked transparency directly to her leadership philosophy, which was found on her president's webpage and was stated in her inaugural address. President Davis stated, "With the servitude leadership philosophy, the leader sits at the bottom of an inverted pyramid, serving people throughout the organization. Some hallmarks of an organization driven by servitude leadership include transparency, honesty and collaboration."

Transparency and student success and completion. The completion agenda, in many ways, was born out of a belief that community colleges were not being transparent about student

success. Each of the participants spoke to the importance of data-driven decision-making and its intersection with transparency and student success initiatives. However, President Davis made some pointed observations about why the state needed to be transparent about its graduation requirements:

> There's the dilemma of trying to get people to understand why we need to do it. Mid-Atlantic state was talking about the 60-unit degree a long, long time before the legislation came out. I think the legislation came out as a frustration from the legislature…. With declining resources, people are really wanting to make sure that the resources are being utilized to the benefit of the whole or the max that you can impact. With the legislation, it really made all the colleges take a look at our general education requirements.

Similarly, for President Smith, being transparent about the achievement gap of African-American students was necessary to promote student success. She made the following statement in regards to her college's work as an ATD institution in closing achievement gaps:

> We could have ignored the shortcomings and simply celebrated the success of a few. We could have steered clear of embarrassing disclosures about the low success rates of our African-American students or developmental learners…. But we chose another path, one that forced us to work together to redesign the college experience. This route involved opening our minds to radically new ways of doing business.

When President Davis and I discussed her observations about how the completion agenda had influenced her institution, the comments she provided below spoke to the necessity of being transparent with the institution's data in attempting to close achievement gaps:

> We're using data. I'll give you an example. We show that we have a 61 percent retention rate, which we could step back and go 'Wow, that's really great because that's better than

the national average.' But when we started to disaggregate the data and started looking at

who was at the 61 percent…. There were groups that were high, and there were groups

that were low. Then we took the data and we started looking at the 50 percent level. What

groups fall under the 50 percent retention rate? That's where we started to set the bar…. I

feel like we have an ethical obligation to make sure that we deliver on what we promise

we're going to deliver.

Equity and Ethical Leadership

In many ways, the community college mission of open access is grounded in equity. As a

concept, equity takes into consideration difference and the many groups in society who have not

always been treated equally or have not had the same opportunities (Shapiro & Stefkovich,

2005). Gilbert & Heller (2013) asserted that since the 1947 President's Commission on Higher

Education (PCHE) report, today's community colleges have continued to focus on equity and

student access and that their efforts to enact policies that benefit community colleges have been

consistent with the Obama Administration. Further, the ethic of justice and ethic of critique

paradigms support an emphasis on equity for today's community college leaders. The ethic of

justice intersects "the rule of law" with "concepts of fairness, equity and justice" (Shapiro &

Stefkovich, 2005, p. 13). The ethic of critique upholds the interests and rights of historically

underserved and disadvantaged individuals (Wood & Nevarez, 2014). Thus, it is not surprising

that each of the participants spoke to an ethical responsibility to be equitable in their decision-

making regarding their students and employees.

Equity in the Classroom. Equitable outcomes for all students resonated with President

Davis, especially as it applied to underperforming minority students. She stated:

If you look at the data and you find that our black students and our Hispanic students are

not necessarily doing as well as our white students, is that our responsibility to see what

we can do to assist the students?... My comment is absolutely yes.

President Davis was particularly concerned that black male students at her campus were not

successful. There has been a national movement to address achievement gaps in minority males,

including AACC's Minority Male Student Success Database (AACC, 2016a). With some degree

of indignation, she made the following statement in our interview:

Why do we have an issue that our black male students aren't achieving their goals at the

same rate as our white students? Why is that? If we're going to profess to bring the

students into our campus and we don't create a welcoming campus, what message are we

sending? Is that ethical? Is that honest? Of course the answer is no.

President Davis's stance on equity and student success has been influenced by her affiliation

with ATD. She made the following statement in an interview with the campus newspaper:

I'm interested in diversity even more so now than I was a week ago. I just came back

from a conference on Achieving the Dream, and I've had some really honest dialogues

with people about helping all of us become more understanding and more tolerant of

different issues that are racial, cultural, socioeconomic, students with disabilities and

students of alternative lifestyles.

As noted in chapter 2, one of the impetuses for the completion agenda is closing the

achievement gap for underrepresented populations and achieving equitable outcomes. During our

interview, President Carter reaffirmed this priority by stating:

There is something about the completion agenda and that is the fact – and it probably ties

itself to ethical leadership and decision-making – is the fact that if we understand the

demographics of our population, we understand the commitment that we have to make to

students of color and students of low-income no matter what our race, ethnicity, or

gender is as the president.

Further, as noted above, President Smith and SCC have redesigned their curriculum to support

underperforming minority students.

      Equity in the workplace. As a community college president, ethical leadership involves

ensuring an equitable workplace as well as an equitable learning environment. For President

Smith, equity in the workplace was illustrated in the story she shared about working with her

board and senior leadership team to merge three campuses into one institution. As President

Smith relayed, this decision permitted her to be equitable across the institution. She stated:

> What's ethical and what's equitable? It took us a while but we had to totally redo almost
>
> every process, procedure, directive that we had because we still had three of
>
> everything…. In one instance, a position that was essentially a theater technician was a
>
> classified position on one campus, a faculty position on another campus, and a
>
> professional staff position on the third campus….It took us 18 months to do a huge
>
> classification and compensation study. The result is everybody at this institution is now,
>
> all 1,397 fulltime employees, faculty, and staff are on a single scale and they have a title
>
> and a salary that is consistent with the work that they do.

President Davis shared a similar experience of having to confront an equity issue that in

her mind affected her employees and staff—a lack of diversity in her teaching faculty. She

stated:

> I started looking at the diversity of our faculty, and our students were about 33% diverse.
>
> Actually at the time I looked at it initially, it was 28 because we're 33% now. But 18%
>
> percent of our faculty were of diverse backgrounds. Then when I drilled down even

further, I found out that it really depended upon what area that you worked in the college

as to whether there was diversity.

Then you look at why don't we have as many African-American students moving

into science and technology. Why are the students going in some of the other directions?

Then you look at the makeup of the faculty. Where is their leadership? Where are those

role models?

We're seeing a tremendous increase in the Hispanic population. We've got a lot

of work to do. It's coming up against an old culture. This has been traditionally a very

white campus. When we know that faculty and staff usually stay at a community college

for 30 or 35 years, the only way to really address some of these issues is taking

opportunities through attrition of faculty and staff.

President Carter also spoke to the importance of making equitable decisions when it

comes to employees, commenting that employees needed to be treated equitably and in the

context of their circumstances. Lastly, it should be noted that each of the participants serves in

an official capacity on a national, state or regional board or association focused on diversity,

equity or inclusion.

Ethical Leadership Conceptualized: Research Question 1

In designing my study, I was interested in understanding how community college

presidents described their ethical leadership. As I engaged each participant in a personal

interview and reviewed each participant's interview transcript, social media, and other

documents, the ways in which they conceptualized ethical leadership emerged as an overarching

theme. Moreover, scholars have argued for the need for community college leaders to carefully

construct and develop their professional ethical identities (Anderson, Harbor, & Davies, 2007;

Boggs, 2003; Vaughn, 2000; Wood & Nevarez, 2014). Thus, conceptualizing ethical leadership is based upon how each participant defined or illustrated a personal understanding of what it means to be an ethical leader. It should be noted that there will be some overlap between conceptualizing ethical leadership and the four major themes of accountability, advocacy and validation, transparency, and equity.

Credibility, a college president's greatest asset. President Smith has had a long and successful career in community colleges. Having worked her way up the ranks from faculty to progressively more responsible administrative positions and ultimately two presidencies, she has had the years of experience to stand firm and speak confidently about her convictions. When it came down to defining ethical leadership, she quickly answered with, "Credibility is a college president's greatest asset. Protect it by always telling the truth." She explained to me that she came to this understanding back in the early 90s when she was the chief academic officer at a former institution and had read a book by a community college president who first coined the phrase. As she reflected on the statement and her career, she stated, "He said it well but this has always been the way I would approach whatever level of engagement I occupied as a faculty member, as essentially assistant dean, then as an academic officer, and finally as a president." As she put it, "So when I think about that whole question of ethical leadership, I frame it in a broad way….If you're going to run an institution like this. You don't need beauty. You don't need wealth. You need credibility."

Another way in which President Smith conceptualized ethical leadership was with the notion of good, old fashioned honesty. As she stated, "to me…ethical leadership [is] being honest, telling the truth, not dissembling, not leading people to think things are worse than they are or better than they are but pretty much this is how they are." Later in our interview, she

further elaborated, "…part of what I think your broad definition of ethical leadership is it's sort of just calling a spade a spade…." Moreover, President Smith conveyed that a watchful eye on the institution's mission was one of the best tools for ensuring honesty and ethical leadership.

President Smith spoke to the relevance of the institution's mission as a living, breathing document more so than any of the other participants in their interviews. In many ways, she conceptualized ethical leadership as having the ability to consistently connect the work of the institution and its president to its mission. As she stated, "honoring your mission is kind of the parallel with ethical leadership." She further elaborated, "Keep it simple. Keep it honest. Keep it focused on what is the mission and where do we spend our money. We spend our money on our mission." In reflecting on the role of today's community college presidents she stated:

> So when I think about our role today, I really always think about it through the lens of mission, but I always think about the fact that I have a responsibility to lead an institution honestly and with as much integrity as I can bring to the position.

For President Smith, conceptualizing ethical leadership involved, "a philosophy of administering, of talking, of living, of learning, or working that was really very much embedded in ethical decision-making." In some ways, this philosophy was best illustrated by President Smith's comments about her leadership style. As she stated:

> So if you really look at the institution from that vantage point, it goes back to that old notion of servant leadership. That's how I look at my job, and I never take for granted that I hold the position that I do. I'm always a little bit humbled when I think about what I get to do every day, who I am now. Not because of me or my ego but who I am now and what ability I have to shape this institution in such a way that it can actually do what it does for the 65,000 people who come here ever year.

President Smith also conceptualized ethical leadership as "people have [ing] to trust you as an honest purveyor of the truth."

Doing what's right. President Carter has had a long successful career at her current institution. She has been at the college for over 20 years, having first been hired as a vice president before being promoted to her current position as president. For President Carter, the concept of ethical leadership was based on "doing what's right" in a general sense and "doing what's right" for the students she serves. She stated:

> For me, ethical leadership is really about doing what's right. And maybe that's a simplistic way of looking at it; and what's right, in many ways, is defined by what your policies and procedures are, what you know is right for students in terms of your practices, what you know is right based upon the research and the data, what you know is right based upon the demographics of your students, and the experiences that they bring with them.

In the context of discussing her responsibility of modeling ethical behavior for her employees, President Carter stated:

> I think it's the same for employees of the institution and that we all accept a responsibility to do a job the best that we can based upon the job description. And ethical leadership, I think, really calls for a level of accountability, responsibility, and a commitment to really understand the mission and the vision and to live that mission, vision, and value the way in which they are intended.

President Carter learned about ethical behavior and leadership in her formative years. Her parents worked hard to provide for her family. In a local newspaper article a few years ago, she spoke about the influence her upbringing has had on her character. She told the reporter:

One of the stories I tell people all the time is that at night before we went to sleep, we would say the Lord's Prayer in unison. My father would then say, 'What is the family motto?' And we would respond, 'One for all and all for one.' We repeated that for as long as I can remember.

When she and I spoke, it was clear that her upbringing, especially the notions of sharing, maintaining confidentiality, and being responsible to and for one another, anchored her conceptualization of ethical leadership. She stated:

I grew up in a large family. I had eight brothers and sisters and my parents. At any given time, my uncle or somebody would be living with us. We lived in a four-room house and that was a living room, a kitchen, two bedrooms. So my parents had one bedroom and the 9, 10, or 11 of us, whoever had moved in, had the other one. So I'm telling you I have learned. I know what teamwork is. I have learned that everybody has a different personality but we have to pull together in order to make things happen….I have learned …to have effective working relationships where confidentiality is respected, where listening to and understanding the opinions of others is expected, that you can't have in the room all people who agree with you because in some cases senior administrators aren't always the smartest people at the institution. I've learned to share. I've learned to be open and honest, but not to a fault…. Hapless honesty is like nobody wants to be bothered with you but I think honesty with tact preserves relationships.

Being values-centered and student-focused. President Davis has more than 25 years' experience at the community college and as noted earlier has won an award for ethics, character, and leadership. Similarly to President Carter, she defined ethical leadership as, "doing the right

thing." Yet, she also pointed out that having ethics also requires an understanding of what it means to be unethical. She stated:

> Ethics – being honest, moral, values-centered, student-focused – it's almost as much defining what it is as what it isn't. It's not getting caught up in things that are not on the up-and-up that might be personal gain."

As with President Carter and President Smith, President Davis came to an early understanding of ethics and values from her father. She shared the following about whom and what helped conceptualize her understanding of values and ethical leadership:

> I think it's my dad. It's the way I grew up. I grew up being expected to be honest. I grew up expected to be respectful of people. I grew up understanding that everybody in the organization, no matter what level they're at, is just as important as another person at another level of the organization. Nobody is any better than anybody else. Everybody has value. I grew up with those values.

> In addition to being values-centered, President Davis also conceptualized ethical leadership as keeping her word. She stated, "I feel like we have an ethical obligation to make sure that we deliver on what we promise we're going to deliver." This was especially important to her as it pertained to the students she serves. She stated, "It's good that we keep ourselves grounded in an ethical platform for our students so that they can trust us." For President Davis, trust was an essential component of how she conceptualized ethical leadership. She stated, "Our community knows that they can trust us….When people feel that they're not really cared about, you can say it all you want, but that's not ethical because you're not practicing what you're professing."

Summary of ethical leadership conceptualized: Research question 1. For the participants in this study, conceptualizing ethical leadership was in many ways based upon their personal values and experiences. As such, four subthemes emerged for research question one: a) honesty, b) servant leadership, c) trust, and 4) mission. These subthemes were determined based on two or more of the participants using these terms to define or illustrate their personal understanding of what it means to be an ethical leader. Figure 4 illustrates conceptualizing ethical leadership subthemes.

Figure 4. Conceptualizing Ethical Leadership Subthemes				
Participants	Honesty	Mission	Servant Leadership	Trust
President Carter	✓	✓		
President Davis	✓		✓	✓
President Smith	✓	✓	✓	✓

Ethical Decision-Making Operationalized: Research Question 2

Wood and Nevarez (2014) reported that community college leaders are responding to an ever-changing landscape that requires an awareness of their ethical decision-making processes. In designing my study, I was interested in understanding how community college presidents executed ethical decision-making, especially as it related to student success initiatives stemming from the completion agenda. As I engaged each participant in a personal interview and reviewed their interview transcripts, social media, and other documents, the ways in which they operationalized ethical decision-making emerged as an overarching theme. Moreover, scholars

have reported that it is imperative that community college leaders utilize an ethical decision-making framework (Mitchell, 2012; Oliver & Hioco, 2012; Wood & Nevarez, 2014). Thus, operationalizing ethical leadership is based upon how each participant demonstrated, modeled or put into practice ethical decision-making, especially as it related to student success initiatives stemming from the completion agenda. It should be noted that in this section there will be some overlap in the four major themes described in section one: a) accountability, b) advocacy and validation, c) transparency and, d) equity.

Front and center. Part of President Smith's leadership style is to be direct in her communication. In fact, one of the first things she told me in our interview was that, "I have nothing to hide. Anything I say to you is fair game." In regard to her institution, she further went on to say that she was "proud of who we are and what we do here and the fact that we were the first Achieving the Dream college in Mid-Atlantic state." In President Smith's opinion, joining ATD, "really speaks to what is the major drive here, and it's a vision that serves and supports students and seeks the best ways possible to do that." One of the ways in which President Smith operationalized her ethical decision-making processes is by keeping the college community informed of the challenges that are confronting the institution and laying out a plan for tackling these challenges. As an example, she shared a story about when the college had to address necessary budget cuts, and what she wanted to make abundantly clear was her ethical responsibility to inform the college of exactly what they were going to do to save money. As she stated:

> I don't have any reason to lie to people. I don't have any reason to tell them that the government took a million dollars away from us. I can't tell them this is so bad we have to lay people off if that's not true. So I told them yeah, we lost a million dollars. What

does that mean? We eat a little less. We travel a little less. We don't hire anybody for three months and we'll end up in the black. And that's the way we do things.

Building on this model of operationalizing ethical leadership by keeping the college community informed of her decisions, President Smith grounds her decision-making in the institution's mission, vision and values, which also drive their strategic plan. She stated:

I never begin a presentation without starting with our mission. And every time we do a strategic plan, the steering committee reviews the mission, recommends changes. This is how we do it, every one of us. Part of my job is to make sure that everybody who works here understands this is our mission; this is our vision; these are our goals….If the president doesn't know what the mission, vision, and values are, then forget it. Nobody else is going to.

During our interview, President Smith gave me a copy of her institution's strategic plan brochure and held up her mousepad, which had the strategic plan printed on it. About the strategic plan, she stated, "Every time we finish our strategic plan we get a new one of these. It's everywhere. It's on every student computer desk; it's on every one of our desks." Further, President Smith operationalized her ethical decision-making by issuing an annual report card with the results of a survey of all of the college employees' involvement in supporting students' success and completion. As she stated about the mission, vision, values and strategic plan of her organization:

It's not the president saying this is who we are. It is the voices from many directions saying this is who we think we are and then we have that conversation through the kind of forum discussion that we have. Mission, vision, value, and goals. All simple. No big deal. No strategic plan that sits in my drawer and gathers dust. A strategic plan we

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live… Every year we do a survey in the spring of everybody who wants to participate….Faculty staff, fulltime, part time, and every area of the college is there with questions about efficacy and doing their job and so on and so forth. Then at our final gathering, our professional day, I'll do a kind of report card. The one place that always, always makes me proud to share with the people is when we get to the end and we have generic questions like, 'Do you understand the mission of the college? Do you feel that your work directly supports students?'….And every year, consistently, the rankings within the answers to those three questions are in the 92nd to 96th percentile.

Regarding the completion agenda, as noted earlier, President Smith felt very strongly that Complete College America, the Obama administration, AACC and others had unfairly portrayed community colleges in a poor light because they were using IPEDS data and had defined completion too narrowly. As one of Mid-Atlantic state's most vocal and active community college presidents, one of the ways in which she operationalized her ethical decision- making was to help define and identify appropriate completion measures for community college students. As she stated at one of Mid-Atlantic state's completion summits:

We accepted a challenge on behalf of all of our institutions that we would indeed meet this expectation of increasing completion rates on our campuses, but we said two important things in this document and there are two things that I would like you to sort of not just cling to, but take hold of and help us make happen. The first is that we said we will be committed to completion, but it must be the broad definition of completion that reflects our mission: degrees, certificates, transfer and workplace certification. If that is our mission, you can't measure output unless you look at mission. It can't be the other way around. The second thing we said in this document is don't even bother trying to

figure out how many of our students complete a degree in just two years or three years not when you have a statewide population 65% of whom attend part time with an average age of 28, many of whom have families and full time jobs. So, we are pushing an agenda together that is very powerful and very meaningful in terms of what the community colleges in [Mid-Atlantic] state are truly committed to doing.

Flexible communication. President Carter emphasized flexibility and communication during our interview as essential skills for today's community college presidents. As she stated, being a community college president today is about "flexibility and being able to communicate. It's being able to tell the story to the community, both internal and external, in a compelling way." One of the ways in which President Carter operationalized her ethical decision-making is through open communication with her institution's internal stakeholders before decisions are made. She stated:

 We do have faculty senate and the student government association, the administrative and professional staff organization, the technical and support staff, and … a support union. But we've created a process whereby there's representation of all of those groups on our college-wide forum, and they are responsible for hearing all policies, new policies, or policy amendments first before it gets to me so that they can debate, come to some conclusion about what they want to recommend to me, and then my job is to read it.

If I have any questions, I can send those questions back. If it's really sensitive, I will actually go and speak before the forum. So that if I am not going to approve something, they're very clear about the why, what it is I'm not approving, and why not. Then I may make suggestions and say, 'But there's an opportunity to review this again and think about it from this perspective.' I would say that since I've been president, 95%

of what has come to me from the forum I have approved. I may have asked a few

questions but I have approved. There's 5% where I sent it back and said either a no or

you need to look at this again and take these things into consideration as you do.

Further, President Carter elaborated by stating that she models ethical behavior and her mission,

vision and values "in a couple of ways and one is by example, living it." She further stated that:

When we have our employee/ faculty/ staff convocation, I always talk about the mission

of the institution, our vision, our values. We actually write them down. So in every

document that we have, we start off with our mission vision, and values. In our strategic

plan, the first thing you see are mission, vision, and values. At our board meetings, our

mission, vision, and values sit around the room and they're on cards in front of each

board member….It is how we talk to students…. You chose to come to [this] college and

here's the kind of institution we believe that you have crossed the threshold onto.

Mid-Atlantic state's completion legislation requires that each higher education public

institution provide incentives for students to obtain an associate's degree before enrolling in a

public four-year institution. It also mandates that Mid-Atlantic state's public higher education

institutions require all students to have a degree-plan, which is defined as an outline of the

program requirements that must be completed by undergraduate students enrolled in the state's

public higher education institutions in order to earn a degree.

President Carter and I discussed the ways in which she utilized social media to

communicate with the college community, especially students who need to be reminded of

important registration deadlines stemming from a no late-registration policy the institution

implemented in response to the completion agenda. Although President Carter acknowledged

that she did ultimately stand behind the no late registration policy, it was a tough call for her. In fact, she described it as an ethical dilemma initially. She stated:

> What I struggled with early on was doing away with late registration because…our old policy was that a student can go into a class as long as they have not met twice. So if you miss the class on Monday, you can certainly go into the class on Wednesday. My concern was how much is happening in 50 minutes on Monday that the student can't catch up on Wednesday. And I'll be frank. In some ways, I still struggle with that….Faculty members can start teaching on the first day and my premise always has been because I served as an adjunct professor that I always teach on the first day. Whoever is not there, they have to catch up. Now, I'll help them as much as I can in my office hours and I'll say, 'Make sure you get with your classmates on the notes and everything in the syllabus. If you have any questions, make sure you come and see me, and I'm going to keep checking on you to see how you're doing.' So that was hard for me to deal with late registration….but I let people convince me. We didn't have an enrollment drop around that because we did a huge campaign internally and externally around late registration. But you know there are some things where you say is this helping us or is it driving students away? Is it giving students whatever excuse they need to say, 'This is too hard. I can't do this?'

Thus, one of the ways that President Carter operationalized ethical decision-making regarding the student success initiative of no late registration is communicating directly with students through Twitter. As she stated:

> We certainly send messages with regard to a continuing student. 'It's time to register. Don't stand in line.' We send messages that say, 'Make sure you're reviewing your

educational plan so that you stay on track.' We send messages that say, 'If you're at the

30 credit benchmark, it's time to schedule that appointment with your advisor'…. Fifteen,

30, 45, 60 credits we'll send off messages that tell students that student orientation and

registration sessions are going to start occurring.

Modeling for the team. President Davis values teamwork and spoke to the importance

of modeling the behavior she expects of her team. She stated, "I think as a leader, it's really

important we model what we expect to the people that work with us." When we discussed the

attributes necessary for today's community college presidents, she further elaborated:

You've got to be flexible. You've got to be nimble. You've got to be strategic. You've

got to know that you have a team in place to help you. You need to use them….I think

it's important that if you're asking something from someone or you're expecting

something from a group of people that you work with that you model that.

For President Davis, teamwork is essential to running an efficient and ethically-sound

institution. "Part of my ethical leadership also is including my team. If I have a really great idea

or I think it's a really great idea, I run it by my team. They'll help me with it," she stated. Thus,

one of the ways in which she operationalizes her ethical decision-making is by getting buy-in

and support from her team and probing them to provide checks and balances. According to

President Davis, her team is expected to respectfully question her decisions. They have said to

her, "'Have you thought about this? Have you thought about the ramifications of this? Yes, that

seems like a good idea, but do you realize it impacts over here?'" In cultivating a teamwork

approach to leadership, President Davis stated, "I believe in shared success, but I also believe in

shared accountability."

President Davis also operationalized her ethical decision-making by including the larger college community as part of her team and sharing her mission and vision with them publicly. Moreover, President Davis issues an annual report card to stakeholders on her institution's performance as related to its strategic plan. Similarly to President Smith and President Carter, President Davis communicates with the college community through convocation, forums and institutional organizations. She stated:

> We have convocation twice a year, which is really my only time to stand in front of the faculty and talk about what my mission and vision are and where I see the college going….I get an opportunity to share there. I get an opportunity to discuss it when I go to our teaching faculty organizations or academic forms.

Further, as part of operationalizing her ethical leadership, President Davis believes in rumor abatement and giving the college community an opportunity to pose questions to her. As she stated:

> You hear rumors. You hear innuendos. I started developing these open forums where people could come and just ask questions. If people don't feel comfortable asking a question, they can put it on a three-by-five card. They can send it across the aisle. We wouldn't even know who said it.

As for the completion agenda, in President Davis's estimation, Mid-Atlantic state's legislation was justified. As she stated, delays in meaningful reform were "why a lot of these mandatory mandates went into place." She further elaborated that in some ways the completion agenda was necessary because "we could go around in circles with these arguments."

Mid-Atlantic state's completion legislation calls for a pathways system to help accelerate developmental learners. Pathway systems are non-traditional approaches to developmental math,

reading and English courses and include module design, embedded tutoring, and accelerated

pathways among the options. Thus, community colleges in Mid-Atlantic state were charged with

designing innovative approaches to address developmental education, including course and

program redesign. According to President Davis, when her institution was not accepted into one

of the national Pathways Projects, she made an executive decision. Unlike Mid-Atlantic state's

pathway system, the national Pathways Project is a completion initiative devoted to creating very

specific program maps for students that are aligned with workforce expectations and the next

level of education expected for their career choice (AACC, 2016b). Thus, another way that

President Davis operationalized her ethical decision-making in response to student success

initiatives stemming from the completion agenda was by making an executive decision to

unofficially participate in the national pathways project. She stated:

> This is where presidents sometimes have to step in and say 'I respect the work that
> everybody's doing, but ultimately we have to make a decision. This is what we're doing.'
> That's what I did here with the Pathways project. We didn't get to be one of the 30
> colleges. I wanted to do that project…. And then when we didn't get in and I said 'We're
> doing it anyway.' Some people were really excited about it. But some people were like
> 'Oh my gosh! You're kidding me. It's going to mean more work, duplicate committees.'
> I said 'Let's figure out how to not make it duplicate.' I've got a team right now that's
> actually working on ways to get that completion agenda going – looking at the entry, the
> connection of the college, the entry, progression, and retention.

Summary of ethical decision-making operationalized: Research question 2. For the

participants in this study, operationalizing ethical decision-making involved communicating with

stakeholders in a variety of ways, soliciting feedback from the community and keeping them

abreast of issues and trends, and making executive decisions. Holding college-wide forums and meeting with stakeholders were the most common strategies for executing ethical decision-making. Figure 5 illustrates how the participants operationalized their ethical decision-making.

Participants	Convocation	Forums	Stakeholder Meetings	Model Behavior	Report Card	Social Media	Survey
Figure 5. Ethical Decision-Making Operationalized							
Pres. Carter	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Pres. Davis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pres. Smith		✓	✓		✓		✓

Ethical Decision-Making Institutionalized: Research Question 3

In designing my study, I was interested in understanding how community college presidents established ethical standards within their institutions. As I engaged each participant in a personal interview and reviewed their interview transcripts, institution websites, reports, and other documents, the ways in which they institutionalized ethical leadership emerged as an overarching theme. Mitchell (2012) reported that presidents felt it was important that their decisions conform to the college mission and that effective decision-making requires the ability to balance stakeholder needs with college resources, mission, vision, and values, which stem from one's personal ethical perspective. Thus, in addition to taking into consideration interview responses, I examined institutional strategic plans, accreditation reports, annual reports, and other reporting documents. Thus, institutionalizing ethical leadership is based upon how each participant formalized ethical standards across the institution as evidenced in these documents. It

should be noted that there is some overlap with the major themes described in section one: a) accountability, b) advocacy and validation, c) transparency and, d) equity.

Accreditation reports. As noted earlier, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) is the accreditation association for the Mid-Atlantic region. Each of the participants in this study is president of an MSCHE accredited institution. According to MSCHE:

Middle States accreditation is an expression of confidence in an institution's mission and goals, its performance, and its resources. An institution is accredited when the educational community has verified that its goals are achieved through self-regulation and peer review. The extent to which each educational institution accepts and fulfills the responsibilities inherent in the process of accreditation is a measure of its commitment to striving for and achieving excellence in its endeavors (2014, p. 1).

Currently, MSCHE has seven standards and 15 requirements "which serve as an ongoing guide for those institutions considering application for membership, those accepted as candidate institutions, and those accredited institutions engaged in self-review and peer evaluation" (MSCHE, 2014, p. 1). However, the institutions in this study conducted their self-study reports on MSCHE's prior 14 standards. See Appendix F for the 14 MSCHE standards (MSCHE, 2016). Standard 6: Integrity was examined to determine the extent to which each participant institutionalized ethical leadership as exhibited in the institution's self-study report. Standard 6 states, "In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom" (MSCHE, 2014, para. 4).

President Smith's institution submitted its self-study report in 2012. During our interview, President Smith reflected on the process of submitting the self-study report. She stated:

> Middle State's accreditation requires that each college addresses and meets these multiple standards. Integrity is one of them…. 2012 was our accreditation and we really pressed our people to pay attention to the words of the expectation and to make sure that we were benchmarking ourselves not just to the letter but to the spirit of those things because we had a lot of growing to do along those lines. We had to get everybody to a more common understanding of who we are, what we do, and how – as a college – we have an obligation to our students, to our staff, to our community.
>
> When our team left in 2012, we were already gratified because… when they said, 'our college is a well-run, well organized, absolutely mission-centric institution absolutely committed to student success,' I thought home run. That's who we want to be and we had done enough work up to 2012. We had done most of the heavy lifting on resolving the inequities within the campus communities.

President Smith's institution's self-study report begins with a president's message. In the message, President Smith speaks to the completion agenda by stating that her institution has "tackled the challenges and issues besetting our sector and are taking the lead nationally in crafting proactive solutions – acceleration of developmental education, completion, resource compression, outcomes assessment, planning, etc." The presidential message further stated that since the college's last accreditation in 2002, much has been accomplished regarding completion: "Best of all, the benchmarks of student success – i.e. the number of degrees,

certificates, transfers, and workplace certifications awarded each year – are growing

exponentially."

The self-study process requires each institution to provide an overview and analysis of

evidence for each of the MSCHE standards. At President Smith's institution, the Standard 6:

Integrity overview referenced the strategic plan which defined integrity as "inspiring public trust

by maintaining ethical, honest, and trustworthy relationships with faculty, students, staff, and the

community." In SCC's self-study, there were three categories for analysis of evidence: a)

Integrity in Academics, b) Integrity in Student and Personnel Matters, and c) Integrity in

Communication and Respect for the Other. Consistent with President Smith's interview

comments, under integrity in academics there was some emphasis on completion. She stated:

In the spirit of promoting curricular improvement and encouraging program completion

for students, department chairs and program coordinators review all approved courses in their

programs to determine the regularity in which the courses are offered.

Moreover, as reported by President Smith in her interview, stakeholders are surveyed annually.

Thus, the results of the faculty survey on Protection of Academic Freedom were included in this

section, with 74% of faculty surveyed reporting that they were satisfied in 2011, up 9% from

2009.

Under Integrity in Student and Personnel Matters, the institution stated that it

"consistently applies principles of fairness, equity and due process to its treatment of students,

faculty and staff." Regarding employees, several projects were implemented to demonstrate the

institution's commitment to consistent and equitable treatment for all faculty and staff, with

survey results in this category at 70% or above in spring 2011 in three categories: a) the

administration has dealt fairly with faculty – 70% agree, b) the institution was effective at

evaluating faculty – 71% agree, and c) the institution values the diversity of its employees – 77%.

Under Integrity in Communication and Respect for the Other, one of the areas highlighted included the institution having been invited to join ATD because of their efforts in closing the racial achievement gap. "Such projects demonstrate the College's commitment to equality of outcomes for students and not just equality of treatment." Further, as mentioned under operationalizing ethical leadership, this section highlights President Smith's communication efforts. "One of the most important ways that [the college] has dealt with integrity is through improved communication. The push to improve internal and external communication…started with the President and has permeated every level of the College." The Standard 6: Integrity section concluded with the institution's assessment that it is compliant with MSCHE's Fundamental Elements of Integrity. It further stated that the institution's "practices and procedures ensure that the College adheres to clearly articulated ethical standards and to its own policies." There were no recommendations, and the institution was reaccredited in 2012.

President Carter's institution submitted its self-study report in 2015. While we did not discuss the report during our interview, President Carter did disclose that the new employee onboarding program is an important opportunity to convey the relevance of the institution's mission, vision, value statements and its strategic plan, all of which were integral to the institution's MSCHE accreditation. President Carter stated:

> We have our new employee onboarding. So one of the members of the senior team (I do it as often as I can) greets every new employee during the employee onboarding process. And we hand them little pocket cards that talk about the college's mission, the vision, the values, the four overarching goals of the strategic plan.

Although President Carter's MSCHE self-study report does not include a president's message, its introduction provided pertinent information pertaining to the institution's completion efforts. Further, the institution's strategic plan has the overarching goal to "increase completion rates" which was heavily emphasized throughout the self-study report. The institution's affiliation with ATD the last four years is also mentioned. "The focus of Achieving the Dream is to assist community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, to stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree." It is also important to note that the college elected to focus its self-study specifically on the student success completion initiative that has become their strategic plan. In order to protect the anonymity of the institution, I have assigned a pseudonym for this plan, Visualize Success.

Standard 6: Integrity placed additional emphasis on the completion initiative Visualize Success and stated that "Visualize Success refers to the College's completion agenda and institutional priority," which later developed into the institution's strategic plan. There were seven categories of analysis under Standard 6: Integrity:

- Fair and Equitable Environment for Student Success

- Adherence to Ethical Standards for Employees

- Employee Evaluation and Grievance Processes

- Academic and Intellectual Freedom

- Conflict of Interest

- Dissemination of Information to Internal and External Constituencies

- Data Reporting and Integrity in Research

Each category provided brief information on the institution's policies and procedures, governance, constituency groups, and union activities. It should be noted that the New

Employee Orientation/Onboarding Program Dr. Carter discussed in our interview is briefly discussed under Adherence to Ethical Standards for Employees. Moreover, as President Carter mentioned in our interview, during the program, "we talk about who our students are from a demographic perspective – race, ethnicity, income, major, where they live, what their goals are." Standard 6: Integrity (Visualize Success Emphasis) determined that the college has "policies and procedures in place to ensure that the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and integrity in its processes…. However, the College recognizes that a regular cycle of review and dissemination is needed to maintain integrity of policies and procedures." Further, two recommendations were made: "Establish a procedure for regularly reviewing and disseminating governing documents; Develop a formal mechanism of checks and balances to assure the accuracy of web and portal content." The institution was reaccredited in 2015.

President Davis's institution submitted its self-study report in 2014. However, it is to be noted that the institution's self-study report was not available. Therefore, the self-study design report was analyzed as a substitution. As in the self-study report, the self-study design report contained an overview, mission, vision, values statements and the strategic plan and disclosed that it would focus on the student success 2020 plan as its emphasis. However, the section on the 14 MSCHE standards is limited to the questions the self-study intends to answer and the list of documents it intends to consult. Standard 6: Integrity is designed to address how the college's "adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies" contributes to its student success 2020 strategic plan.

Mission, vision, values. An institution's mission, vision and values statements serve as guideposts and lay the foundation for the institution's priorities. Given the changing landscape

of today's community colleges, "changes in mission focus are adaptive behaviors structured by rapid alterations in the social and economic logic of both the public and private sectors" (Meier, 2013, p.16). Presidents Carter, Davis and Smith each spoke to their institution's mission, vision, and values statements and the ways in which these statements provided the foundation for their ethical decision-making. An examination of each institution's mission, vision, and values statements in the context of ethical leadership and the completion agenda illustrated how each participant institutionalized ethical leadership.

For President Smith's institution, completion is a priority as judged by its mission and vision statements. The mission statement espoused to "provide an accessible, affordable and high-quality education that prepares students for transfer and career success, strengthens the regional workforce and enriches our community." Thus, it echoed President Smith's comments during our interview about the relevancy of the mission statement in her role as president. She stated, "Part of my job is to make sure that everybody who works here understands this is our mission, this is our vision, these are our goals." The vision statement, "we will be the institution of choice for students, where together we make teaching purposeful, learning powerful, completion primary, and community paramount," spoke directly and succinctly to the urgency of completion.

The institution's values statement has nine principles: commitment, learning, innovation, responsibility, integrity, inclusiveness, excellence, stewardship and collaboration. Each of these principles begins with a "we" statement that highlighted a specific institutional priority. Commitment, integrity, and stewardship most reflected ideologies brought up in my interview with President Smith. As an example, commitment aligned with President Smith's comments

about how Mid-Atlantic state had worked hard to establish its own definition of completion. It reads as follows:

> We want our students to succeed and move forward to the completion of their educational goals at the college through degree or certificate attainment, transfer, workplace certification, career enhancement, or personal enrichment.

Thus, SCC's commitment moves beyond the completion agenda's narrow definition of graduation that President Smith expressed had done such a great disservice to community colleges.

The integrity principle stated that "We inspire public trust by maintaining ethical and collaborative relationships with our faculty, students, staff, alumni and communities. We share our achievements and challenges honestly and openly." President Smith's annual stakeholder surveys and institution report card were evidence of this principle. Moreover, the stewardship principle stated that "We believe in sustainable practices and prudently manage all of the resources entrusted to us to advance the college's mission and strategic directions." As President Smith put it during our interview, "I often say we put our money where our mission is."

CCC's mission, vision and values statements were more succinct than SCC's and did not speak directly to completion in favor of more global statements regarding student success. As an example, CCC's vision statement was that it will be "the community's first choice for innovative, high quality learning opportunities." Its mission statement that the "College exists to educate, train, and serve our diverse populations through accessible, affordable, and rigorous learning experiences" was also somewhat global; however, it can be inferred that "educate, train, and serve" lend themselves to broader definitions of completion.

Similar to SCC, there were several principles listed under values that begin with "we" statements: excellence, success, diversity, respect, professionalism, and lifelong learning. Each principle was briefly defined with general language. Professionalism touched on ethics and integrity: "We believe all individuals will approach their responsibilities ethically, fairly, and with high standards." For President Carter, ensuring that all employees of CCC are properly on boarded was a priority. As she stated during our interview, CCC's work is:

> …about the mission we signed on to, the values that we all sat around a table and said that we wanted to aspire. It's about the strategic plan that we all put together from the ground up that these were not sort of missions on high.

DCC's mission, vision and values statements were somewhat similar to CCC in that they were broad. DCC's vision stated that it is a "premier learning community whose students and graduates are among the best-prepared citizens and workers of the world." Likewise, its mission statement focused on learning. "With learning as its central mission,… [the] college responds to the needs of a diverse community by offering high quality, affordable, and accessible learning opportunities and is accountable to its stakeholders." Like SCC and CCC, there were several "operating principles of the college values": quality, service, diversity, creativity and innovation, collaboration, communication, integrity, civility, balance, goodwill, and prudence. Each principle began with a "we" statement.

President Davis spoke to prudence and diversity during our interview, as both are foundational to the completion agenda and ATD. DCC's prudence principle stated that, "we believe in the analysis and use of relevant data in making our decisions, while maintaining flexibility in our thinking." One of the things that President Davis stressed in our interview was the importance of establishing benchmarks and using data. As she stated, it is important to have

"measures in place so that when people hold you accountable, you're able to demonstrate what it is that you've done. We're data-driven around here now. We base everything in fact. We base everything in numbers." Moreover, President Davis spoke to her commitment to increasing the diversity at DCC and holding the institution accountable to the diversity principle which stated, "We believe differences in race, color, age, religion, sex, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, ability, genetic information, and veteran status should be respected. We value diversity in preparing students, faculty and staff to be members of the global community." As President Davis stated during our interview, "we've dealt with…the whole diversity issue. I hired a chief diversity officer about a year and half ago."

Strategic plans. The ability to adapt and change in response to external pressures for greater accountability requires that community colleges develop mission statements and strategic plans that align the institution's priorities with its resources (Chance & Williams, 2009; Trettel & Yeager, 2009). Thus, most community colleges operate under strategic plans that outline the institution's commitments and goals over a specified time period. Further, community college presidents have the ultimate responsibility of ensuring that the institution's strategic plans are appropriate. The study participants' strategic plans were examined to determine the extent to which they addressed completion and ethical decision-making.

SCC's strategic plan had four strategic directions: a) student success, b) teaching and learning excellence, c) organizational excellence, and d) community engagement, with each strategic direction anchored in a "we believe" statement. Completion was mentioned multiple times in the student success and the teaching and learning excellence directions. President Smith's emphasis on multiple measures of completion was reflected in Strategic Direction One: Student Success which stated, "…The college assists students in achieving their completion

goals, leading to a degree or certificate, obtaining transfer credits, developing specific skills, expanding employment opportunities, or enriching their personal lives." These multiple measures were further supported by SCC's belief that "efforts to measure and track student success must focus on enhancing outcomes that emphasize the student's own completion goal." Strategic Direction Two: Teaching and Learning Excellence, balanced a commitment to "enhance the quality, effectiveness and innovation of teaching and learning initiatives to promote a success-centered, completion-oriented environment" with "foster[ing] accessible and supportive learning environments, enabling students to identify and achieve their educational and career goals." Strategic Direction Three: Organizational Excellence, emphasized ethics principles of stewardship, equity, and fairness. Overall, SCC's strategic plan reinforced the institution's pledge to completion which is echoed by President Smith's assertion that SCC is "committed to access, opportunity, and completion."

CCC's strategic plan also had four strategic goals: a) enhancing pathways that guide students to achieve their academic, career and personal goals, b) cultivating a welcoming and responsive learning environment, c) fostering partnerships to respond to a diverse and evolving community and workforce, and d) promoting and supporting a collaborative institutional culture for communication, decision-making and governance. Each strategic goal was accompanied by institutional priorities. Strategic goal one incorporated completion-specific priorities. Strategic goal four incorporated decision-making priorities.

Strategic goal one had three institutional priorities. Priority one, "implement pathways designed to promote student retention, progress, and completion," had an area goal to "redesign curriculum to promote retention and completion" and included area objectives to increase completion in developmental English and reading and completion of the English gateway course.

Further, institutional priority two, "expand innovative models for delivery of courses, programs and services," included two completion metrics: "Increase number of completions per program," and "Identify programs with low completion rates and intervene."

Strategic goal four had two institutional priorities dealing with decision-making: "increase the use of data in decision-making," and "broaden opportunities for students, faculty, and staff feedback and input in decision-making processes." These priorities reflected a commitment to ensuring ethical leadership for students and employees that was expressed by President Carter during our interview. Moreover, these priorities are aligned with President Carter's statement about the relevance of CCC's strategic plan. As President Carter stated during our interview:

> At any institution where I've worked or might have wanted to work, if it were not for students there would be no need for us to be here. So you know what folks? … It's about the mission we signed on to, the values that we all sat around a table and said that we wanted to aspire. It's about the strategic plan that we all put together from the ground up that these were not sort of missions on high.

Overall, CCC's strategic plan emphasized completion and included information on developmental education, data-driven decision-making and soliciting feedback from stakeholders.

Like SCC and CCC, DCC's student success strategic plan had four key principles: a) committed leadership, b) use of evidence to improve programs and services, c) broad engagement, and d) systemic institutional improvement, which were adopted from ATD's Field Guide for Improving Student Success. There were no goals that addressed decision-making or employees. However, DCC's student success strategic plan included five goals, three of which

were completion driven. Similar to CCC, one goal focused on completion of developmental education students: "increase the percent of students with developmental needs completing all developmental course requirements." Also similar to CCC, one goal focused on completion of gatekeeper courses immediately following developmental education: "increase the success in gatekeeper courses of students completing their developmental requirements." These goals align with Mid-Atlantic state's completion legislation that mandates providing pathways for developmental learners and requiring all students to complete their gateway courses within their first 24 credit hours. The third completion goal, "double completion of certificates, degrees and credentials" by 2020 was the most closely aligned with Mid-Atlantic state's completion goal of 55% of its residents earning a degree or credential by 2025. Similar to SCC, DCC issues an annual report card on their strategic plan.

As mentioned earlier, President Davis has served as president in another region that had already passed completion legislation that included developmental education reform. One of the barriers to completion is developmental education (Bailey, 2009). Thus, DCC's strategic plan's emphasis on developmental learners is reflected in President Davis's statement regarding mandatory developmental education placement versus students who self-place into credit courses. During our interview, she stated:

> Looking at the data… It's interesting with placement ratios and placement numbers. Some of the students that are self-placing are doing just as well in colleges as the students that are being put into prerequisite areas that are potentially two to three semesters longer for the students.

Overall, CCC's strategic plan emphasized completion and paid particular attention to developmental education students.

Summary of ethical decision-making institutionalized: Research question 3. For the participants in this study, institutionalizing ethical decision-making was demonstrated in their accreditation reports; mission, vision and values statements; and strategic plans. Similarities in accreditation reports included: institutional definitions of integrity (SCC, and DCC), introductory information on importance of completion (SCC, CCC), and emphasis on student success strategic plans (CCC, DCC). Similarities in the mission, vision, and values statements included each institution's mission statement focused on student learning, and each institution's values statement included several principles. However, SCC's vision statement included completion, while CCC's and DCC's vision statements were broader and did not mention completion specifically, although DCC also mentioned preparing citizens of the world. SCC was the only institution that included integrity as one of its principles. However, CCC's professionalism principle and DCC's prudence principles touched on ethics and integrity. Similarities in strategic plans included each institution having four strategic directions/goals/ principles that included completion-specific objectives. However, DCC included leadership as one of its principles, and CCC emphasized decision-making as one of its goals. Additionally, both CCC and DCC included developmental education goals.

Summary

Although each participant described ethical leadership and experienced ethical decision-making uniquely, there were commonalities in the data that emerged as predominant themes. The data revealed that there were four major themes of ethical leadership:

- Accountably to stakeholders
- Advocacy for and validation of the community college mission and its students

- Transparency in decision-making and issues confronting the community college

- Equity when dealing with students and employees

The data also revealed that there were three overarching themes of ethical leadership and decision-making:

- How participants conceptualized ethical leadership

- How participants operationalized ethical decision-making

- How participants institutionalized ethical decision-making

These three overarching themes corresponded to the three central research questions:

1. How do community college presidents describe ethical leadership?

2. How do community college presidents execute ethical decision-making as it relates to student success initiatives stemming from the completion agenda?

3. What is the role of ethical leadership in establishing policies that stem from the completion agenda?

There were four subthemes regarding conceptualizing ethical leadership:

- Being honest

- Focusing on the mission

- Being trustworthy

- Subscribing to the servant leadership philosophy

The two most prominent mechanisms for operationalizing ethical-decision-making were holding forums and stakeholder meetings. The data revealed that strategic plans; mission, vision, and values statements; and accreditation reports confirmed how each participant and the institution institutionalized ethical decision-making as it pertained to the completion agenda and ethical leadership.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Today's community colleges, as the nation's open access and most affordable path to higher education, are being called upon more so than ever to graduate more students, increase transfer rates, or place students into the workforce more quickly. With decreased resources and unfunded mandates, today's community college leaders are challenged to do even more with less. At the same time, political leaders, higher education stakeholders, special interest groups and not-for-profit organizations have demanded greater accountability measures. Thus, it is imperative that those aspiring to senior-level positions, especially CEOs, have a firm understanding of the leadership competencies necessary to run a community college efficiently and ethically. Further, at a time when scholars and national higher education organizations and associations have announced that there is a significant shortage of community college leaders prepared to assume senior-level positions including the presidency, it is paramount that those seeking to fill these vacancies articulate the critical role ethical leadership plays in the health and productivity of an institution.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Achieving the Dream (ATD), and the Aspen Institute, among others, have stressed the urgency in developing leadership competencies and best practices that directly or indirectly underscore the role of ethics in community college leadership. In their joint report *Crisis and Opportunity: Aligning the Community College Presidency with Student Success,* The Aspen Institute and ATD listed "Ethical and Risk-Averse Behavior" among the top presidential qualities boards of trustees value most. When community college presidents exhibit ethical leadership and establish ethical norms

that align with the institution's mission and vision, the community college is a rewarding entity for students, employees and local society (Hellmich, 2007).

The purpose of this descriptive, qualitative case study was to examine how community college presidents described ethical leadership and executed ethical decision-making in responding to institutional policy implications stemming from the completion agenda. The central research questions were as follows:

1. How do community college presidents describe ethical leadership?

2. How do community college presidents execute ethical decision-making as it relates to student success initiatives stemming from the completion agenda?

3. What is the role of ethical leadership in establishing policies that stem from the completion agenda?

In order to investigate current perspectives of how community college presidents demonstrate ethical leadership and execute ethical decision-making in response to the completion agenda, three, ATD community college presidents from the same Mid-Atlantic state that recently passed comprehensive completion agenda legislation were interviewed. Each president's institution's accreditation documents, annual reports and strategic plans, as well as websites and social media, were also examined.

Major Findings and the Literature

The major findings of this study reflected in the first central research question suggested that community college presidents conceptualized ethical leadership as being honest, trustworthy, mission-centric, and subscribing to the servant leadership philosophy. Honesty, trustworthiness and servant leadership are heavily supported in the literature. Several scholars commented that honesty was essential to ethical leadership (Boggs, 2003; Brown, Trevino, &

Harrison, 2006; Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2013). Moreover, Yukl (2013) asserted that servant

leaders establish trust by being honest and ensuring that their actions and behavior are consistent

with values. Northouse (2007) asserted that due to the leader-follower relationship, the servant

leadership philosophy is a foundation to ethical leadership. Yukl (2013) asserted that

trustworthiness is part of one's integrity, whereas Wood and Nevarez's (2014) ethical decision-

making paradigm, the ethic of care, identified trust as one of its key virtues. Moreover, AACC

(2005a) included trust and respect for all individuals as one of its recommended code of ethics

for community college CEOs. Mitchell (2012) and Wood and Nevarez (2014) affirmed the

relevance an institution's mission plays in the CEO's ethical leadership. Further, although

AACC's (2005) core competencies for community college leaders stipulates that effective

community college leaders sustain the community college mission in five of its six core

competencies, one possible conclusion from this study suggested the need for a greater emphasis

on the intersection of an institution's mission with its CEO's ethical philosophy.

The major findings of this study reflected in the second and third central research

questions suggested that community college presidents operationalized ethical decision-making

in four ways: a) communicating with stakeholders, b) soliciting feedback, c) informing the

community of issues, and d) making executive decisions. Their accreditation reports; mission,

vision, and values statements; strategic plans; and annual reports provided examples of how they

institutionalized ethical decision-making. While the participants in this study described their

ethical leadership philosophies as based on honesty, trust, servant leadership, transparency,

accountability, advocacy, validation, equity, and open communication, there were limitations in

the strategies they employed for ethical decision-making. As an example, Oliver and Hioco's

(2012) framework for ethical decision-making integrated critical thinking and ethics and

included nine questions centered on defining the issue; outlining alternatives, consequences, and options; and considering the laws, policies, and standards surrounding the issue. However, for the participants in this study, ethical decision-making was primarily based upon open communication, as none of the participants elaborated on any preliminary steps undertaken to define issues and weigh pros and cons before moving forward in addressing the issue.

Accountability and ethical leadership. Wood and Nevarez (2014) identified accountability as one of the five core virtues necessary for today's community college leaders. In many ways, the ethic of justice, which emphasizes a leader's responsibility to being aware of the policies, procedures, laws, and standards that govern an institution (Wood & Nevarez, 2014) is based on accountability. The participants each spoke to accountability often and in great detail during our interviews. As a result, it was the most dominant theme of the four that emerged. In listening to their stories of leadership during our interviews, I noted that accountability was viewed in three ways. One way accountability was viewed was as a sometimes arbitrary measure of the success of community colleges at large, in Mid-Atlantic state, and at their specific institutions. Secondly, accountability was viewed as a personal responsibility to the stakeholders the participants serve. Thirdly, accountability was viewed as a necessary force to motivate community colleges to take deliberate action to increase completion rates.

The completion agenda, as a national reform movement to increase attainment rates, emphasizes data-driven decision-making and greater accountability efforts (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Kelly & Schneider, 2012). Accountability in public education, especially K-12, is regarded as a significant factor in school performance improvement and is viewed by the public and educators as a much needed component leading to positive changes in schools (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). Scholars, the federal government, and national associations have called for

an increased emphasis on accountability systems for higher education (Heller, 2001; Lombardi & Capaldi, 1996; Zumeta, 2001). For today's community college presidents, demonstrating a capacity to hold themselves and their institution accountable is essential.

One evident conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that community colleges will continue to be confronted with demands for increased accountability. Further, the participants in this study validated Immerwahr, Johnson, and Gasbarra's (2008) study of more than two dozen college and university presidents who reported that being held accountable for improving and maintaining quality education at a time when there are increasing costs of higher education and more and more students with differing needs is among the greatest concerns to presidents. Therefore, it is incumbent upon community college presidents to embrace a philosophy of accountability as part of their ethical leadership.

Advocacy and validation in ethical leadership. For the participants in this study, advocacy included safe-guarding the community college mission by validating community college students' varied experiences, including those students who are the most underprepared and disadvantaged. It also involved an ethical responsibility to advocate for appropriate measures for completion while also responding to the national call to educate more citizens and prepare them to enter into the workforce. However, supporting the completion agenda also required validating the contributions of community college faculty and staff whose work supports student success.

Wood and Nevarez (2014) asserted that there are four paradigms that community college leaders should consider in their ethical decision-making processes. Three of the paradigms, the ethic of critique, the ethic of local community, and the ethic of care, suggest that community college presidents have a responsibility to advocate for the community college mission, their

institutions and their students by validating their experiences. The ethic of critique framework

validates the needs of historically disadvantaged groups and those that are underserved (Wood &

Nevarez, 2014). The participants in this study spoke extensively about their responsibility to

uphold the community college mission of open access and meeting students where they are. The

ethic of local community was designed specifically for community college leaders and takes into

consideration that ethical decision-making considers the best interest and needs of the local

community the institution serves (Wood & Nevarez, 2014). Additionally, the ethic of care leader

validates those with whom one works. Thus, participants in this study affirmed their ethical duty

to respond to the needs of the local community. Moreover, The Aspen Institute and ATD

asserted that a "deep commitment to student access and success" (p. 5) is quality one of its five

core qualities for today's exceptional community college presidents.

     Transparency and ethical leadership. Effective, timely communication with

stakeholders is critical to ethical leadership according to the participants in this study. The

participants also confirmed the importance of standing behind one's decision, even if the

decision ultimately turns out to not have been the best. They noted that ethical decision-making

involves keeping the stakeholders abreast of the issues and the president's stance on those issues.

The participants shared a variety of modes of transparent communication, with the most popular

being consistent meetings with stakeholders. Further, each of the participants believed that

transparency involves sharing the data from which decisions will be made. Likewise, being open

and transparent with stakeholders about data and outcomes is fundamental to accountability

(McPhail, 2011).

     AACC (2005) lists communication as one of its five core competencies for community

college leaders, noting that community college leaders have a responsibility to "engage in

honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community" (p. 4).

Moreover, The Aspen Institute and ATD affirmed that while being transparent is essential for community college presidents to effectively lead their organizations, it is not without its risks. In the context of the completion agenda, they asserted that being transparent about low levels of student success and completion, as well as realigning resources appropriately to advance student success outcomes, is critical but uncommon among today's community college presidents (The Aspen Institute, 2013).

Equity and ethical leadership. Equity was a critical component of ethical leadership for each of the participants in this study. The participants were especially vested in assuring equitable outcomes for all students, particularly low-performing and minority students. The participants also reported that equity in the workplace was paramount to ethical leadership. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) and Wood and Nevarez (2014) asserted that equity is foundational to the ethical decision-making paradigms of justice, care, critique, profession and local community.

Achieving the Dream (ATD) posits that higher education institutions have a responsibility to "work toward equity for their students." ATD further asserts that "equity is grounded in the principle of fairness. In higher education, equity refers to ensuring that each student receives what they need to be successful through the intentional design of the college experience" (ATD, 2016a, para, 1).

Recommendations

- One recommendation for the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is to revise and update the 2005 competencies to include much more specific content on the

significance of accountability, both personally and professionally, for today's community college presidents. In 2005, AACC published *Competencies for Community College Leaders.* Although they acknowledged that leadership skills had broadened because of "greater student diversity, advances in technology, accountability demands and globalization" (p. 2), the competencies failed to adequately define and emphasize accountability beyond a financial or general lens. Accountability is mentioned under the resource management competency which states, "Ensure accountability in reporting" (p. 3). Under the professionalism competency, "demonstrate accountability to and for the institution is mentioned."

- A second recommendation for the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is to align its 2005 leadership competencies with the contemporary competencies found in *Crisis and Opportunity.* In 2013, The Aspen Institute and ATD acknowledged that "the increasing focus on accountability for completion rates will require that presidents know how to communicate with urgency the need to improve student outcomes, strategically plan and execute effective strategies, and evaluate data to assess progress" (Aspen Institute, 2013, p. 9). Moreover, they outlined seven required strengths of today's community college presidents to respond to the increasing political demands for accountability.

- A third recommendation is for higher education leadership graduate programs, especially those focused on community college leadership, to incorporate ethical leadership and decision-making as part of their curriculum. This finding is supported by Yukl (2013) who concluded that scholars have debated the appropriate ways to define and assess ethical leadership. Given that the participants in this study were experienced, high-

achieving presidents with a clear sense of their ethical identities, their ability to articulate

their ethical decision-making does not preclude that up-and-coming community college

CEOs of the near future will have these skillsets. By 2017, it is anticipated that 500

community colleges will be under the helm of different presidents than they were in 2013

(Aspen Institute, 2013). Therefore, it is incumbent upon community college leadership

programs preparing tomorrow's community college CEOs to provide a solid foundation

for ethical decision-making processes.

- A fourth recommendation for the many community colleges engaged in succession

  planning efforts (Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010) is to develop grow-your-own

  leadership programs that specifically address the role of ethical leadership at the

  community college and incorporate strategies for ethical decision-making.

- A fifth recommendation for community college presidents is to take clear and deliberate

  action to cultivate one's ethical identity and to safeguard that identity by monitoring

  social media. Barnes and Lescault (2013) reported that college presidents are much more

  active in social media than their business counterparts, hosting their own blogs and

  Tweeting. For community college presidents, it is important that their social media

  presence aligns with their personal and professional ethical identity.

- A sixth recommendation for boards of trustees is to prioritize ethical leadership and

  decision-making when recruiting and hiring community college presidents. Although The

  Aspen Institute and ATD reported that trustees listed ethical and risk-averse behavior

  among the five characteristics they value in presidents, trustees were primarily concerned

  with avoiding scandals and maintaining the institution's stability (Aspen Institute, 2013).

  However, a more pro-active approach to screening presidential candidates to determine if

their ethical identity and ethical decision-making processes align with the institution's

mission, vision, values and culture is necessary to ensuring an ethically sound and

efficient institution.

- A seventh and final recommendation for higher education special interest groups and

  advocacy organizations is to work more collaboratively with community college CEO's

  and governing boards to identify and articulate completion agenda challenges and

  realistic outcomes for today's community colleges. Doing so might help alleviate the

  disparate perspectives of public leaders, state legislators, and college presidents who as

  stakeholders must agree on their definition of the problem before moving forward with a

  resolution (Immerwahr, Johnson, & Gasbarra, 2008). A collaborative approach to

  redefining completion agenda goals, such as a common understanding of appropriate

  measures for completion and accountability (McPhail, 2011), could help ensure that the

  nation reaches its attainment and completion goals (Hauptman, 2013).

Conclusion

In large part due to the completion agenda, community college leaders have had to switch

their focus from access to success, taking bold steps to increase the completion rates of today's

students. At a time when resources are dwindling and states are embracing high-stakes

accountability measures such as performance-based funding, community college CEO's face

challenges that necessitate that they make difficult decisions in order to protect the efficiency and

integrity of their organizations. Ethical leadership is essential to their doing so. The community

college ethical leader has a firm grasp of what it means to be accountable, to advocate for the

community college mission, to validate the experiences of community college students and those

who serve them, to be transparent when communicating with all stakeholders, and to be equitable in making decisions. A community college president, as an ethical leader entrusted with the care, safety and overall management of the institution, ensures that the institution's mission, vision, and values are grounded in ethical principles.

Implications for Future Study

As the literature suggests, very few qualitative studies on ethical leadership exist. Moreover, there are limited studies on the implications of the completion agenda on statewide community colleges. A larger body of research on ethical leadership as it pertains to community college CEOs will help those considering a presidency understand the intersection between their leadership philosophies and contemporary issues like the completion agenda facing today's community colleges. Additionally, since ethical leadership is also based on leader-follower relationships, future studies on ethical leadership and decision-making that include the perspective of followers will add to the body of knowledge. Finally, there are numerous quantitative studies on ethical leadership in business and healthcare; however, more extensive quantitative research on community college ethical leadership and decision-making will not only add to the body of literature but will also help inform community college leadership programs, community college associations, and affinity groups seeking to prepare and develop future community college CEOs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A DATA COLLECTION DISPLAY

Central Research Questions	Primary Sources	Secondary Sources
How do community college presidents describe the role of ethical leadership?	Semi- Structured Interviews with Presidents Media Interviews with Presidents	Presidential Webpages Biographies
How do community college presidents execute ethical decision-making as it relates to student success initiatives stemming from the completion agenda?	Semi- Structured Interviews with Presidents Media Interviews with Presidents Presidential Tweets Presidential Speeches Presidential Video Blogs	Presidential Webpages Presidential Messages via Webpages Strategic Plans Annual Reports Presidential Reports Press Releases Legislative Hearing Presentations
What is the role of ethical leadership in establishing policies that stem from the completion agenda?	Semi- Structured Interviews with Presidents Media Interviews with Presidents Presidential Tweets Presidential Speeches Presidential Video Blogs	Accreditation Reports Mission, Vision & Value Statements BOT Reports/Minutes/Agendas Institution and ATD Brochures Town Hall/County Reports Strategic Plans ATD Webpages

APPENDIX B PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

January 4, 2016

Dear President:

Happy New Year! I hope that you are well. My name is Monica Parrish Trent, and I am a doctoral candidate in community college leadership in the Darden College of Education at Old Dominion University. I am writing to respectfully request that you participate in my dissertation study. My dissertation is tentatively titled Ethical Leadership in Today's Community Colleges: Presidents Respond to the Completion Agenda. I would like to speak with you about how you have actualized ethical leadership as a community college president. I have selected you because you are a current community college president of an Achieving the Dream Institute in the state of Maryland. As such, I am interested in understanding the factors surrounding how you have made and executed decisions pertaining to completion agenda initiatives within your state and at your institution.

My dissertation committee is comprised of Old Dominion University faculty members Dr. Dana Burnett (Educational Foundations and Leadership, Dissertation Chair), Dr. Christopher Glass (Educational Foundations and Leadership), and Dr. Alan Schwitzer (Counseling and Human Development), as well as Dr. DeRionne P. Pollard (President, Montgomery College). My committee and I are interested in studying the context in which community college presidents implement ethical decision-making. We hope this study will serve as a guide to new and emerging community college presidents who must successfully navigate the changing community college landscape.

Participation in this study requires one, semi-structured interview of approximately 60 minutes at a private location convenient to you. While an in-person interview is preferred, a telephone or GoTo meeting interview is also an option, if more convenient for you. In order to facilitate accurate data analysis, the interview will be audiotaped. Any data that I collect for this study will be stored in a secure office, on a password protected computer. The audio files will be transcribed and stored in a locked file cabinet. The original audio files will be stored on a password protected computer.

I am excited about this research and hope that you will seriously consider participating in my study. By drawing attention to successful community college presidents of Achieving the Dream institutions in Maryland, I hope that my study will help community colleges and their boards understand the ethical-decision-making skills necessary to effectively lead today's community colleges.

If you are able to participate in this study, please feel free to contact me via telephone or email. I would very much like to schedule our interview within the next few weeks.

Sincerely,
Monica Parrish Trent
Principal Investigator:
Name – Monica Parrish Trent
Phone – 301-802-9567
Email – mtren002@odu.edu
Dissertation Chair – Dr. Dana Burnett

APPENDIX C FOLLOW-UP LETTER CONFIRMING PARTICIPATION

January 11, 2016

Dear President :

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my dissertation study on ethical leadership in today's community colleges. I understand the time constraints of a community college president and am grateful that you have found time in your busy schedule to accommodate my request.

As I shared with you, I am interested in understanding the factors surrounding how you have made and executed decisions pertaining to completion agenda initiatives within your state and at your institution. As a president of a Maryland Achieving the Dream institution, your perspective will be invaluable to my research.

Confidentiality will be strictly maintained throughout the study regarding your identity and responses. Comments will not be attributed to you by name or institution in any published reports of findings. To ensure accuracy and credibility, member checking will be utilized, giving you an opportunity to review segments of the data you provide (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time during the interview process.

I appreciate your participation in my study, and I look forward to meeting you soon.

Sincerely,

Monica Parrish Trent

Doctoral Candidate, Old Dominion University

Principal Investigator:
Name – Monica Parrish Trent
Phone – 301-802-9567
Email – mtren002@odu.edu
Dissertation Chair – Dr. Dana Burnett
Email – dburnett@odu.edu
Phone – 757-683-3287

APPENDIX D INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE:
Ethical leadership in today's community colleges: Presidents respond to the completion agenda.

INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this form is to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The proposed title of this study is Ethical leadership in today's community colleges: Presidents respond to the completion agenda.

RESEARCHERS
Principal Investigator: Monica Parrish Trent, PhD Candidate
Community College Leadership, Old Dominion University
Dissertation Chair: Dr. Dana Burnett

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY
Several quantitative studies have been conducted looking into the subject of ethical leadership. However, there are no known qualitative studies investigating how community college presidents execute ethical decision-making. This study will examine how community college presidents perceive and execute ethical leadership in responding to institutional policy implications stemming from the completion agenda.

If you decide to participate, you will join a study involving research of community college presidents' ethical decision-making. In a 60-minute, semi-structured interview, you will be asked questions regarding how you have made and executed decisions pertaining to completion agenda initiatives within your state and at your institution.

The procedures involve individual, audio-taped, semi-structured interviews of community college presidents in the same Mid-Atlantic state. If you say YES, then your participation will last for approximately 1 hour at a mutually agreed upon location, via telephone, or GoTo Meeting. Approximately 3 community college presidents will be participating in this study. If available, I would like to collect your most recent vita, biography and other documents that you can share with me that describe your leadership.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA
There are no identified exclusionary criteria.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
RISKS: There are no identifiable risks known at this time. With any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: The main benefit to you for participating in this study is sharing your expertise and insight with the higher education sector, in particular community colleges. Others might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the factors that contribute to community college presidents' ethical decision-making.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS
The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

NEW INFORMATION
If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Confidentiality will be strictly maintained throughout the study regarding your identity and responses. Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized as follows: 1) comments will not be attributed to you by name or institution in any published reports of findings, and your name will be changed to a pseudonym; 2) a code will be placed on the transcript and any other collected data, and the researcher will only have access to the code key; 3) any data that I

collect for this study will be stored in a secure office, on a password protected computer; 4) the audio files will be transcribed and stored in a locked file cabinet; and 5) the original audio files will be stored on a password protected computer. Transcripts and data will be destroyed after 10 years. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. If you decide to stop participation in this study, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you may otherwise qualify. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm, injury, or illness arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Monica Parrish Trent, Principal Investigator at 301-802-9567 or mtren002@odu.edu, or Dr. Theodore Remley, Jr., Chair of the Darden College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee at 757-683-3326 or tremley@odu.edu, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

> **Principal Investigator:** Monica Parrish Trent, 301-802-9567, mtren002@odu.edu
> **Dissertation Chair**: Dr. Dana Burnett, 757-683-3287, dburnett@odu.edu

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should contact Dr. Theodore, Remley, Jr., Chair of the Darden College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee at 757-683-3326 or tremley@odu.edu or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature
Date

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	**Date**

APPENDIX E INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction: Thank you sincerely for agreeing to be interviewed as part of this study on ethical leadership and decision-making in today's community colleges. My name is Monica Parrish Trent, and I am a doctoral candidate at Old Dominion University. As I shared with you, my study seeks to understand the ethical decision-making processes of community college presidents relative to the completion agenda.

As we have discussed, your identity and responses will remain strictly confidential. Comments will not be attributed to you by name or institution in any published reports of findings. I have asked to tape record our conversation to assist with getting an accurate account of your thoughts on the topics we discuss.

Please read and sign the Informed Consent Form. Your signature will indicate that you consent to participate in the study and to an audio recording or our interview.

The interview will last approximately 1 hour. I will be asking you a series of semi-structured questions with possible probes for clarification.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Let's begin.

Conclusion of interview: Thank you very much for your participation in my study. I appreciate the time you have allotted for this interview. Your input will be invaluable toward a greater understanding of ethical leadership and decision-making at the presidential level of Achieving the Dream institutions in one Mid-Atlantic state.

1. I would like to begin with having you share your definition of ethical leadership and how you came to develop this definition.

    a. Is there an experience that you can share that helped shape your understanding of ethical leadership?

2. From your perspective, what are the most important characteristics of today's community college presidents?

    a. What factors should presidents be aware of in executing ethical decision-making?

3. How would you describe your leadership style?

    a. What personal values have you found to be the most beneficial when facing significant challenges as a community college president?

4. Please describe how you see the completion agenda impacting your role as a community college president of your institution?

    a. What dilemmas have you encountered in responding to your state's completion legislation?

    b. Can you share an example of a difficult decision that you've had to make regarding the completion agenda?

    c. What has surprised you about completion agenda initiatives in your state?

5. How do you communicate your mission, vision and values?

    a. In your experience, what impact has social media had on you as a community college president?

    b. In what ways have you used social media to communicate your mission, vision and values regarding completion agenda initiatives?

6. How do you establish ethical standards within your organization?

7. What advice would you share with emerging community college presidents (and those who are designing programs to train and develop them) regarding leading today's community college?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not already addressed?

APPENDIX F MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION STANDARDS

Standard	Name
Standard 1:	Mission and Goals
Standard 2:	Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal
Standard 3:	Institutional Resources
Standard 4:	Leadership and Governance
Standard 5:	Administration
Standard 6:	Integrity
Standard 7:	Institutional Assessment
Standard 8:	Student Admissions and Retention
Standard 9:	Student Support Services
Standard 10:	Faculty
Standard 11:	Educational Offerings
Standard 12:	General Education
Standard 13:	Related Educational Activities
Standard 14:	Assessment of Student Learning

VITA

Monica Parrish Trent

Old Dominion University

Darden College of Education, Graduate Programs

218 Education Building

Norfolk, VA 23529

Monica Parrish Trent earned a Master of Arts in English: Teaching Composition and Literature in May of 1994 from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in English in August 1991 from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. She is currently Dean of the American English Language Program, Linguistics and Communication Studies at Montgomery College in Montgomery County, Maryland. She has previously served as the Associate Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Montgomery College. She also served as a faculty member in the English Department at Montgomery College and was a tenured faculty member in the English Department of Brookdale Community College in Lincroft, New Jersey.